

# THE STORY OF EDEN

BY DOLF WYLLARDE











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*By*  
DOLF WYLLARDE

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DEDICATION

*Pass, mine Enemy, —*

*Friend, pause and look*

*I, Dolf Wyllarde,*

*Have written this book.*





## PART ONE



# The Story of Eden

## PART ONE

### CHAPTER I

*"Where the harder natures soften,  
And the softer harden,—  
Certes, such things have been often  
Since we left Eve's Garden."*

THE sun was coming.

First there was nothing but clear gold radiance; then long arrows of light shot across the fir-trees and vineyards, which struck out spots of clear yellow on the distant mountain-sides; then the brazen disk itself. Not a cloud came with him as attendant, he sprang out upon Wynberg as the round horizon of the world turned just that hair's breadth upon her axis that brought him into view, — a round ball of burning gold, he flashed up above the fir-tree belt into the empty heavens awaiting him, and brought the broad cloudless African day.

The sun always shot sideways into the garden at Traveller's Rest. He hurled his golden arrows across the little vineyard and struck the hackia hedge with sure and certain aim every day. Then he pierced the trees which stood sentinel-wise round the house, and having won the outer fortifications, he fought a battle with the shadows of the stoep, and won. By the time Mrs. Drysdale came downstairs to breakfast, he had got into the room before her, and was shining bravely on the cool white grapes, and the big bowl of olean- ders, and the empty space waiting for the dish with the



hot-buttered mealies. It was no use bringing in the mealies until both Oswald Drysdale and his wife had sat down to the table, because they liked them hot or not at all, and in this particular the Kaffir servants had found that they were mild, but firm.

Mrs. Drysdale loved the sun, like all good South Africans. She opened the windows yet wider, and pulled the blinds half-way up, and made him welcome. Then she sat down to open her letters, while her husband grunted over the paper, and the mealies appeared; after which a great peace reigned until the hot dish was a thing of the past. I defy any one to eat hot buttered mealies with a proper attention to the proportions of salt and pepper, and to talk intelligently at the same time. A mealy is as little to be trifled with as any other South African representative. People who have lived long in the Colony know this, and treat them accordingly.

It is impossible, in this world, to over-estimate the breakfast hour, for upon the influence of eggs and bacon, or tea and toast, depend the issues of many a day — and a day can make or mar a life.

“Ossy — I have forgotten all about the Cunningham girl!” Mrs. Drysdale said, and she put down her first piece of toast to say it.

“What girl?” her husband questioned, as he turned the paper. “I believe we’ve lost another seat, Clarice. There’s a Bondman in. Won’t you have some marmalade?”

Mrs. Drysdale helped herself absently. It was the toast which had set her thinking of a neglected duty; as she crunched, she mentally masticated her social engagements at the same time.

“Why, Professor Cunningham’s sister. Do attend, Ossy, never mind the by-elections.”

“Well, what about Cunningham?”

“I met him at Friedenhof, — I believe the Dodds

are the only people he visits, — and he told me that his sister was coming out in the *Dunottar Castle*, and the boat was in last Tuesday."

"And this is Monday — nearly a week. Well, what about it?"

"Why, I said I'd call and see if I could do anything for her. She knows nothing of the Colony, and you can imagine the kind of household Vine Lodge is! Anthony Cunningham is a Professor of Entomology, not a man. He knows all about a beetle, and nothing at all about himself, much less his servants. Of course the house will be uninhabitable."

As Drysdale threw himself back in his chair to laugh, he looked out of the window and caught the whirr and glitter of a cycle flying down the drive. "Here's Livingston," he said.

The hall door stood open after a careless custom in the neighbourhood, so the early visitor did not even have to unlatch it — it was never locked by day; he leaned his machine against one of the pillars of the stoep, and walked straight into the house and the room where Drysdale and his wife were at breakfast.

"Good-morning, Drysdale," he said in a peculiarly charming voice. "You have seen the paper I see — another seat gone! I should like to make a bonfire and destroy the electors in bundles. It would clear the country a little."

As he made his inhuman speech with indifferent cheerfulness, he sat down at the table, and taking a bunch of grapes from the dish in front of him, began to eat them. He was a man who might have been between fifty and sixty, for he was somewhat bald, and what little hair he had was quite white, as was also his pointed Vandyke beard. But his beautiful blue eyes danced with a great youth, and his handsome face was as fresh and healthy as a boy's. So no one ever asked Beaumont Livingston's age, any more than they ques-

tioned his right to do and say exactly what he pleased. The impertinence of a gentleman may be unlimited, so long as he is too thorough-bred to offend.

"You have n't finished your marmalade," he said coolly, peering into Mrs. Drysdale's plate. "That will never do. It is such a bad example."

"Well, you need n't follow it," she retorted. "I am very much distressed, Beau,—I have forgotten all about a girl whom I said I would go and look at, and Ossy will talk about the elections and forgets to pass the toast."

"Is she worth looking at?" Livingston asked as he supplied the omission.

"I don't know. I have n't seen her yet; I must drive round there this morning. What is on to-day?"

"The Dodds have tennis."

"Somebody has tennis every day this week! It is my turn on Wednesday. Have you finished frowning over the paper, Ossy? I heard the cart drive round some minutes since."

"What it is to be a business man!" said Livingston, lightly, as they strolled out onto the stoep. "You have my sincerest sympathy, Ossy. It is going to be infernally hot!"

"Unless the wind changes—when it will probably be infernally cold! That is the African climate over which we all rave—while we are in England!"

"Have you heard Mr. Forrester's last witticism on the weather?" said Mrs. Drysdale.

"I have not—and I do not wish to," returned Livingston, pointedly. "Forrester is an Oxford man. Heaven defend me from the soldier who still smells of the university!"

"He is very amusing, nevertheless. Some one was condoling with him on the fearful changes of last week,—25° in one day three times running, was n't it?—and he remarked that if one went out in Africa one



needed to take a portmanteau and change behind a hedge ! ”

“ Not bad,” said Drysdale, as he motioned to the Kaffir boy to bring the cart up to the steps. “ I have sometimes gone out overclothed, and come back sneezing. So long, Clarice ! I ’ll look in at the Dodds’ this afternoon, and bring you back, if you like.”

“ Yes, do. And, Ossy, don’t be late. You might get a set if you turned up about five.”

“ Have you heard that Cayley is ordered out to Simon’s Town on special duty ? ” said Livingston, as the cart rolled out of the gate. “ It is a sell for Mrs. Redmayne, and a good thing for his purse.”

“ Don’t talk scandal, Beau ! I like Cissie Redmayne, and I believe she is devoted to her husband.”

“ Devotion to a husband — may I smoke ? Thanks ! — generally implies an equal devotion from some one else ! If I were married, and my wife were devoted to me, I should institute divorce proceedings — provided always that the temperature was over seventy.”

“ Beau, if I did not worship the ground you tread on, I should positively dislike you ! I am going to order the dinner. Will you smoke on the stoep ? ”

“ No, I must be going. I have an idea that I am busy to-day. By the way, I think Ossy meant to invite me to dinner ; that he did not do so was mere forgetfulness ! ”

“ Come if you like — there will be grapes at least ! I shall see you this afternoon at Friedenhof ? ”

“ Certainly ! And you can take me home with you ! Au revoir ! ”

He lifted his hat airily, and wheeled his machine into the road. Mrs. Drysdale heard the whirr of the wheels as she stood cutting flowers in the garden to refill her vases. She strolled back to the house again with her hands full of oleanders, walked in at a long open window, and arranged her dinner in her own

mind while she arranged her flowers. By the time the cart came back from the station she was waiting on the stoep, and took the reins from Leaf to drive herself into the village.

"It is really going to be hot!" she said to herself, as she was trotted out of her own gate and along the shady red road between the fir-trees. "I wish we had a Cape cart instead of this open trap, only that means a pair. Steady, Bob! I shall have to let Leaf drive you, and put up a sunshade, I believe." The pony was pulling, and the sun was increasing in power; by the time Mrs. Drysdale had visited the baker, the butcher, and the post-office, had bowed to seven acquaintances, and stopped to chat to three, she was glad to resign the driving seat and shield herself from the glare.

"I want to drive round by Vine Lodge, Leaf," she said absently. She was thinking, as the Kaffir servant turned in the direction indicated, that after all Miss Cunningham was only the Professor's half-sister, so she might be possible after all. It was so irksome to take up a girl who was a mere drag-weight socially, and Anthony Cunningham was frankly detested as the most disagreeable man in the neighbourhood. Even his house had a repellent aspect to Mrs. Drysdale's eyes as they turned in at the gate and pulled up before the stoep.

Her first ring at the bell was unanswered. "I thought so!" said Mrs. Drysdale to herself. "The servants don't do their work properly — perhaps there are none! I never have known how the Professor lived. The door shut too, and most of the windows! How nasty and stuffy the house must be! Ah, at last!"

The door opened slowly to disclose a coloured girl in a dirty print dress, with no cap on her tangled head, and with shoes down at the heel. Mrs. Drysdale's quiet comprehensive glance had the effect however of dispersing the broad grin on her fatuous face.

"Is Miss Cunningham at home?"

"I dunno, Missus!"

"Then you had better go and see. I will wait here."

"I've only bin hyar since yesterday!" the girl volunteered, with a new but fainter grin, and disappeared into the dusk of the hall behind. Mrs. Drysdale chafed. "Dirty, slovenly creature! I should like to have her under me for a week — only I should n't keep her! When I see that kind of Kaffir girl I almost agree with Beau Livingston's barbarous assertion that the land has never been decently governed since the abolition of slavery. Oh, here you are again, are you? — Well, is Miss Cunningham in?"

"Yaas, Missus. Will you come in hyar?"

She shambled along the hall and opened a door into a large room — seemingly the drawing-room, if there had been one. Mrs. Drysdale walked in and looked round her. Some one had evidently made a half-hearted attempt to put it in order, and then abandoned it in despair. One window was open, and a long ray of sunshine struggled in through the partly lowered blinds, displaying the forlorn appearance of ugly, faded furniture, heavy curtains looking terribly out of place in the African summer, a moth-eaten skin or so spread on the carpet, a dilapidated fern-stand with a few plants in it, and —

Mrs. Drysdale turned as the door opened, glad to abandon her dreary inspection. If the room had filled her with pitying dismay however, the girl who advanced to meet her made it worse. She was evidently ashamed of herself to begin with, for she had been crying so that her face was streaked with tear-stains, her fair, fluffy hair was untidy, and her clothing looked hot and uncomfortable beside Mrs. Drysdale's fresh washing dress. The Professor's sister was quite a young girl — probably about nineteen or twenty; her figure was slight, and she was rather small altogether. Whether



or no she was pretty, or could be pretty, Mrs. Drysdale felt it unfair to judge under the present circumstances.

"I am so ashamed of myself, Miss Cunningham," she said, rushing into speech to avoid the awkwardness of the situation. "I meant to have come to see you days ago, and ask if I could do anything for you. Your brother told me you were coming out, and I dare say you find it terribly strange at first, knowing nothing of the country. A bachelor's household is always rather a trial, too, is n't it?"

"Thank you," said the girl, simply. She had a pretty voice, and a very English reserve in her manner. "I should be very grateful if you would give me some advice! I am not used to housekeeping, and I am rather lost out here. It seems so difficult to get anything I want!"

"It ought n't to be. We think ourselves rather well supplied in Wynberg. You see we get the things sent out from Cape Town. Of course you must order in advance, if you want anything special."

"That is just it. You see, Anthony doesn't like ordinary things. He used to dine at the Vineyard until I came, and he doesn't think I manage well, and he grumbles at everything the servants cook, and —and —" To Mrs. Drysdale's horror the tears began to roll down her face again.

"Poor little soul!" she thought remorsefully. "She's had a week's bullying from a bad-tempered man, miles away from everything and everybody that she knows, and is very miserable. No wonder she cries! I howled at first, and I had Ossy to help me and smooth things over. I wish I had come and seen her before! We are selfish brutes to have left a 'tenderfoot' alone like this!"

She took hold of little Miss Cunningham, for she was a tall woman herself, and literally put her into a chair and sat down beside her. "Look here," she said. "It

is n't so bad as that. Don't cry, but tell me all about it. I know what men are when they are not fed properly. It's the servants, I suppose. Have you got a cook?"

"I've got a coloured woman, but she can't cook well, and I don't know how to teach her. Perhaps it is because I am not used to black people."

"Ah, that's the great trouble out here! The servants *are* a trial. But you must go on bullying them — it's no use telling a Kaffir a thing once and then thinking that he will do it. You must see that he does it, and tell him again every day. Has any one been to see you yet?"

"No one but you. I think it is so kind of you to come!"

"I think it is very unkind of us all to have left you alone for so long! We are really like a big family round about here. You can hardly believe it, I suppose, but I think Wynberg a delightful place to live in! It is so gay — almost too gay, I think. We are so lighthearted that we are rather irresponsible. There must be something in the sunshine that makes us so."

"I can't fancy any enjoyment in the neighbourhood of Kaffir servants, and tradesmen from whom one has to order a week ahead!" said the girl, with a faint laugh. "Particularly if you have to keep house for a Professor of Entomology! You don't know how tired I am of being miserable — it makes me feel positively wicked!"

"Unhappiness is n't good for anybody, or moping either. You want to get out and forget your trials for a time. You'll come back fresher for the struggle. What are you going to do this afternoon?"

"I was going to have another try to put this room straight."

"Leave it for to-day. I'll come round to-morrow

morning and help you. I'm going to a tennis afternoon at a house near by, and I'll take you with me and introduce you to the neighbourhood. The hosts are awfully kind-hearted people — very rich Johannesburgers who have settled here. Do come! You can bathe your eyes and put on a white frock, and you'll forget all your troubles for a while!"

The girl's young eyes unconsciously brightened. "I should like it very much," she said with a faint hesitation. "Will you call for me?"

"Yes, about four. Now I must be going — Leaf will think I have got out the back way and walked home!"

"I will come and let you out. Is that your cart? What a pretty pony! I do wish we had something to drive!"

"Have n't you?" said Mrs. Drysdale, in some surprise. "I am sure I have seen your brother driving! I always think he turns out particularly smartly for a scientific man."

"He has a horse and trap that he always hires, I believe, and that the proprietor reserves for him. But I don't know anything about that."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Drysdale, inclusively. "You will have to have something to drive sooner or later though. Every one does about here — even if it is only a donkey cart! You see it is really too hot to walk much in the summer, and the neighbourhood is so spread that you must drive if you mean to visit. Do you ride?"

"Oh, dear, no! I have never had a chance to learn. I have only just learned to cycle." The girl laughed a little, as if her amusement outweighed her chagrin at her own confessions. As she stood on the stoep her hair took a sunnier glint and her round young face defied even the tear-stains to be wholly defacing.

"Good-bye," said Mrs. Drysdale. "I will call for



you at four. Mind you are ready!" "She's very English, and very young, but she is a nice little girl," she added to herself as she drove home. "I think she will brighten up — but she has had a terrible time! I wonder — I wonder what Wynberg will make of her! She has come out too young to retain her personality and make something of Wynberg. Women influence the Colony, but the Colony influences girls."

Margery Cunningham stepped down from the stoep as the cart rolled away, and walked down the garden. She sniffed at the sunshine, drew in long breaths of the pure dry air, and looked at the dazzling distance of sap-green vegetation and dark firs and blue mountains. It was very fresh and green and luxuriant, and it raised in her the eager desire to be happy which is never very dormant in human nature — particularly when one has only had twenty years in which to see that happiness is impossible in the nature of things.

"What a fool I was to cry!" she said to herself. "I like that woman. I hope she will be friends with me. I am afraid she must think me a little idiot to sit down and weep because I can't manage the servants and Anthony grumbles. How nice and cool and smart she looked! I feel so hot and untidy and unsuitable — I must look nice this afternoon, if only to show that I am not always like this. I wonder if I've got anything that will do? — how the sun does shine! It's nonsense to make a trouble of things in such weather!"

She went into the house again, up to her own bedroom, and opened the window wider. The sun followed her in, and even the atmosphere of the house could not dispel his influence. She unlocked a big trunk, which she had not had the heart to do before, and diving in among certain fripperies, found some cooler clothes that were not too crushed with packing. Mrs. Drysdale had already given her the idea that

white was appropriate to the sunshine and the green world round about her. She decided on all the details of her costume, and hunted them out, leaving her pretty task in a reluctant hurry to see that luncheon was properly laid.

The luncheon was most improperly laid, as she soon discovered; when she entered the dining-room she was greeted with a mingled flavour of damp mustiness, which pervaded it from being long shut up, and the smell of burnt food. It was evident that the Kaffir cook had not been successful to-day, and her heart sank as her eyes fell on her half-brother sitting in the arm-chair. He was waiting for his luncheon, — that was one bad mark against her name, she knew, — and the luncheon was making itself manifest beforehand. The youth and pleasure went out of her face, as she quietly took her seat at the head of the table and awaited the storm.

The Professor was a tall man with a narrow chest. His skin was pale and unhealthy from confinement and the effect of a hot climate upon his liver, but he was not by any means to be considered plain. His ginger-coloured hair was worn away, and left the top of his high arched head quite bald; but a large ragged moustache ornamented his upper lip and hid a loose-lipped, ill-tempered mouth, and his prominent brown eyes were large and full. When he glared — as he was doing at the present moment — they were very large and full indeed. He rose as his sister came into the room, and turned round upon her like a snarling dog.

“Is this what you call luncheon, Madge? It is half an hour late to begin with! You know — I have told you — that I expect my meals punctually. It gives me indigestion to wait.”

“I am very sorry, Anthony. I don’t think it is more than five minutes late! That clock is wrong.”

“Why don’t you put it right then? D’you expect

me to see to everything in the house — your duties as well as my own? The place is kept disgracefully. Look at the table! It is like a second-rate lodging house!”

“Mary does not understand how to lay a table properly yet. She is getting better, but if I always do it for her she will never learn. I will come and look it over another time before you come in.”

“You had better alter it in some way, I think! I had you out to look after the house, and I am more uncomfortable than before you came. Why don't you make the servants do their work? Why don't you send them about their business if they don't? Am I to keep servants to do nothing? I have all the paying and none of the comfort, it seems to me, — and it is my money, remember —”

“Don't you think that we had better continue this edifying discussion at another time?” said Madge, changing from red to white. She could see the half-vacant, half-terrified grin on the face of the Kaffir girl Mary, who was bringing in the dishes, and, though it was by no means new to her now, the humiliation seemed almost too much to bear to-day.

“No!” said the Professor, rudely. “I shall speak as I please, and when I think necessary! You seem to think that the house is yours, and you are going to manage things as you please. It's damned bad management too! What's this? The meat is burnt! Take it away — I can't eat that! Upon my word, Madge, I shall dine at the Vineyard, or I shall be starved!”

A long acquaintance with, and a habit of dealing with Kaffirs had given the Professor a boisterous roughness of manner when he wished to enforce his opinions or lost his irritable temper, which he found very efficient in dealing with black females. It had the effect upon the white female opposite him of making



her tremble with rage and nervous terror. She clutched the edge of the table with her hands, and restrained a hysterical desire to shriek as she steadied her voice to answer him.

"Very well, Anthony, if you think you would be more comfortable, I quite agree that it would be better for you to have your meals at the hotel. I will get things into working order as soon as I can. I am sorry I am not a satisfactory housekeeper, but after all you do not pay me a regular salary, so you have only my keep to weigh against my incompetence!"

The Professor sat back in his chair silenced, and scowling under his brows. He was a little ashamed, and a little conscious of having gone too far. An opposition outburst was an excellent thing for him, but it was extremely wearing to the nerves of an adversary who loved peace and was unaccustomed to screaming in an equal degree to his own. Madge had bought a respite from war at the expense of her own luncheon, which she could not eat, not on account of its being badly cooked, but because her nerves were thoroughly jarred. She kept a strained silence while the Professor eat milk pudding, bread and cheese, and grapes, continuing his nagging fire of objections between the courses. Not until he had thrown down his napkin, and risen with a muttered oath as grace, did she gather breath and speak.

"Will you dine at the hotel to-night, Anthony?"

"Yes, certainly, if you can give me nothing better than this!"

"I cannot answer for the servants at present. I think it would be better if you did not have your meals at home. I am tired of being abused."

He began grumbling that he did not want to abuse any one, but the food was disgracefully prepared, and the house a filthy sty, unfit —

"Yes, I know all that," his sister said hastily,

shrinking from the thick Colonial accent which his voice seemed to have caught, and which always made itself manifest in his tempers. "I am going out this afternoon with Mrs. Drysdale. She very kindly offered to take me to a tennis afternoon at Mrs. Dodd's."

"Oh, indeed ! I hope you will look presentable then, that's all. Mrs. Drysdale is a very smart woman, and she knows when people are all right. She won't like taking a dowdy girl about with her."

He spoke coarsely, and had the pleasure of seeing his victim wince. Anthony Cunningham had a system of his own in dealing with a weaker vessel. He sawed his horse's mouth and flogged his dogs until he broke their spirits ; he screamed oaths at his coloured servants, and harried his dependents of all classes. The real terror in Margery's mind was that he would strike her, and then she did not know what she would do. The blind fury he would have raised could not have found expression either in the deadly revenge of a woman of experience, or even the momentary lashes of her tongue. Madge knew herself too young to manage a man with a temper as ungoverned as her brother's, and in all her twenty years she had been treated with a certain consideration and kindness, even while she earned her own bread. She had lived for a week with a perpetual dread of her brother's violence, and a constant guarding against raising it to extremes. Her hands were clenched and her movements unsteady as she left the dining-room and went back to her inspection of her clothes.

"I could n't help it !" she said to herself. "I was getting worse and worse every minute. I wanted to kill him, I was so angry. He drives me. There is nothing I would not do." The short, hard sentences flew through her mind like blows. "I must get out of it for a time, as Mrs. Drysdale said. I can bear it

better then. Oh, why do people make you angry and wicked for nothing?"

She looked out of the window at the warm, sunny land, basking in the joyous afternoon. "How silly!" she said. "As if it really mattered — but it did, — down there in the dining-room and the shadow. I want to get out of the house. I'll dress now and wait in my things."

When Mrs. Drysdale's speckless cart and pony bowled up to the door, Madge was waiting on the stoep, her white figure hovering restlessly between the trellised roses. She flew into the cart like a bird, and fluttered herself down on the seat beside the driver.

"How pretty!" thought Mrs. Drysdale. "And how fresh! She will be a success. I am glad I found her — she is my discovery. What has she on? A white frock, and a shady hat, — but it is n't that. She knows *how* to put them on. She wants to enjoy herself, and she will. She is enjoying herself now, just because she is young and pretty."

"Did n't some one say that the Garden of Eden was in Africa?" said Madge, dreamily, looking at the blue mountains scintillating with the heat at the end of the aisle-like vista of firs.

"Well, if it were, it was certainly round about here. The Eastern Province is ugly, and inland is the Karroo and the veld."

"And the 'Mushroom Cities' that one hears every one talk about so much!" said Madge, laughing.

"Yes," said Mrs. Drysdale, with some dryness. "People at home are very fond of comparing us to mushrooms, — they think it witty. They insist that the social life is the same, — here to-day, gone to-morrow."

"And it is not the fact?"

"Wait and see. We last a few years anyhow, — even the Regiments. The Duke's have been here twelve months already. True is quite an old institution."



“Who is True?”

“He is a little man in the Duke’s whom every one loves. I’ll introduce him to you. He will tell you that he does n’t count, nor does he — except in the best sense. He does unheard-of things, and we all say that it does n’t matter because it is True. The Duke’s are not all so popular. But you will see him and judge for yourself. This is Friedenhof!”

The pony turned his clever head in at the gate and pricked his small ears. “All right, Bob, — no dogs!” said his driver, and he took his way daintily up the drive. “He is afraid of dogs,” she explained to Madge. “We think he must have been hunted at some time. Most Basuto ponies have some vice. Bob bolts from a big dog.”

Madge jumped down as gaily as she had got into the cart, and followed her chaperon up the broad steps onto the stoep. Friedenhof had been built in the days of Dutch landowners; its walls were three feet thick, and its great beamed entrance hall a dwelling room in itself. The front doors were wide open, and people were passing in and out; two or three girls in light frocks and men in flannels stood talking to each other on the stoep, under the climbing green creepers. They paused and looked at Madge with some curiosity, and she saw rather than heard them say, “Who has Mrs. Drysdale got with her?” — “Nobody I know. Is she a visitor?” — “A new face is always interesting.”

Mrs. Drysdale, followed by Madge, walked straight into a room on the left and up to the tea-table, where a stout woman was laughing and talking to two young men who were trying to drink their tea with rackets in one hand and the cup in the other. There were a good many people present, and a universal chattering.

“Ah! it’s all very well, Mr. Forrester!” she said, as Mrs. Drysdale entered. “But I know you are not so wedded to tea that you would n’t rather have a whisky!

Wait until my husband gets you in here alone, when our backs are turned ! ”

“ On my honour, Mrs. Johnnie, I ’d rather have tea if I ’m to play again. And some of Miss Dodd’s cake ! ”

“ Do you hear that, Starling ? Here ’s Mr. Forrester paying you compliments through the oven, as it were ! Your cookery is appreciated here at all events ! ” She turned to attract the attention of a girl who was pouring out the tea, and saw Mrs. Drysdale. “ My dear, how late you are ! ” she said. “ I ’ve been expecting you this half hour. ”

“ I went round to fetch Miss Cunningham, ” said Mrs. Drysdale, drawing Madge forward. “ You did n’t know that Professor Cunningham’s sister had come out, did you, Mrs. Johnnie ? We were all in the dark, and I found her quite dull with seeing nobody, and beginning to think that Africa was indeed a desert ; so I brought her with me by force to have that idea dispelled. We can’t let her write home and tell them that the Colony is a dreadful exile, can we ? ”

“ No, indeed ! We must break you of that impression, my dear ! ” The stout lady took Madge’s hand in both hers and shook it heartily. “ So you ’ve only just come out ! Were n’t you sorry to leave all the gay doings of the Diamond Jubilee behind you ? Not but what we keep it up pretty well here ! There is plenty to do roundabouts, and I always think the young people have a good time of it. Starling ! This is Miss Cunningham — my daughter ! ”

“ How pretty and soft she is ! ” Madge thought to herself, as Miss Dodd turned from the tea-tray and proceeded to make friends. “ She is about my age, but she is n’t nearly so shy as I feel. I like her dark hair and eyes, and the little lisp in her voice. I wonder why they call her Starling ? ”

“ Do you play tennis ? ” Starling said. It was an inevitable question. Madge answered, “ A little. ”

"We will make up a set as soon as you have had your tea. Mr. Livingston, will you give Miss Cunningham some cake? Mr. Livingston — Miss Cunningham. I will find you a good partner, Miss Cunningham, as you say you are out of practice, and he can take all the hard work. I wonder where True is? I am afraid he has just been playing."

Madge looked up as a long sensitive hand offered her the cake, and smiled. "Not quite such a large piece, please!" she said.

"Nonsense! I am quite sure you would eat all that, and then break all the sugar off the top and pick out the plums if there were no one here to see!"

"I daresay I should. Would n't you?"

"I will now, if you will come into a corner with me and share the plunder. Look there, — we will take those two seats by the sideboard, behind Johnnie Dodd. His back makes a most effective screen! Do you know Johnnie Dodd?"

"I don't know any one," said Madge, looking up at the fat black back behind which Mr. Livingston had settled her. "Is he our host?"

"I am not quite certain. Sometimes I think he is, and sometimes I think he is only a host in himself. He is one of the nicest men hereabouts, — but then, we are all rather nice."

"Oh, Mr. Livingston! What *are* you doing! You have really cut off all the sugar top!"

"Of course I have. There! That is half for you and half for me. Now if any one discovers us, I shall say it is all your fault! Ah, I hoped you would laugh!"

"Why?"

"Because your laugh is particularly pretty. Here is Starling coming to rout us out, and I am not at all pleased. My dear girl, when will you learn not to interrupt when not wanted?"



"Don't take any notice of him, Miss Cunningham. Nobody here does. We have all got so used to him that I am afraid he says many things unrebuked that we ought to suppress. Will you play with me, Mr. Livingston? I can't find True, but I think he is on the court. We will go and see."

"No, I am going to play with Miss Cunningham. Have you got your shoes on, Miss Cunningham? Yes? I wonder where you get your shoes!"

"I brought these from home with me."

"Don't wear them out. You won't find it easy to replace them."

"I thought you had such good shops in Cape Town!"

"Ah, but they don't keep small sizes enough. (I hope she won't lose her faculty of blushing, very soon. That was as delicious as a winter sunset.) Who is going to play with you against us, Starling?" he added aloud.

"True, if I can get him. I shall see. Miss Cunningham has not yet said that she will play with you, however."

"That is jealousy!" said Beau, airily. "Notice the malicious way in which she tries to part us, Miss Cunningham! Last week I was her slave, — she cannot bear being dethroned!"

Madge felt rather as if her head were whirling. The light chatter all round her in the tea-room, which had seemed to her crowded, the way that this man with the pointed white beard and the young eyes rattled on, Starling's careless verbal retorts flung over her shoulder as she led the way, — all coming together after her week's depression, and seeing no one but her brother, made her a little bewildered. They were approaching the tennis ground through the plumbago walk, and she glanced up longingly at the clusters of exquisite flowers hanging over her head.

"Do you want some?" Livingston asked, stopping to pull a spray carelessly down.

"If I might have a piece to wear. Oh, that's enough, — don't pull any more!"

"Nonsense! I am always saying nonsense to you. Johnnie Dodd would be delighted to give you the whole hedge. Let me put it into your waistband for you."

His delicate, characteristic fingers tucked the flowers into her belt, with a familiarity which made Madge take a reassuring glance at his white hair to excuse herself. Starling had gone on in front; Madge followed her with a quickened step, and then asked herself why with some annoyance.

"I can't get used to the gravel courts," she said, hastily, as they emerged opposite the netted square among the fir-trees.

"They are all gravel here. It makes the game much quicker. I have come to prefer these shady netted courts to the open field in which people always play in England, with the sun blinding you on one side, and the balls going into the next county on the other."

"I can't find True; he has gone to the house for tea, I suppose. I will get some one else. Will you take your places?" Starling said.

Madge was becoming curious over the ever-recurring True, and was sorry he was not her adversary. She had not much time to discover who that was, or what he was like, before the game began, and then all the attention she could spare from her balls was given to her partner. Considering his age, Beaumont Livingston was a wonderful player. Madge was nervous and out of practice, but her admiration for the cool manner in which he covered her mistakes made her do her best, and they only lost the set by one game.

"I congratulate ourselves," he said. "If our opponents had not played in such exceedingly bad form

—Starling, listen to what I am saying!— we should have won. They placed all their balls, and screwed their service. It is better to have lost the set by one than to have gained it in such a dastardly fashion.”

“I will throw all the balls at you if you say another word,” said Starling, coming up to the other side of the net. “We won by sheer good play, did n’t we?” she added to her partner over her shoulder. Starling had a way of turning her head like a bird, and tossing her soft-voiced words to people at a distance, who generally caught them deftly, as something precious.

“Good play is never sheer,” said Livingston, adroitly. “Look at that woman who has just arrived, Miss Cunningham! Does n’t she remind you of a vinegar bottle with the cork left out? She is very good. Very good people always make me long to label them and put them on a shelf in rows— until wanted.”

“Only no one ever would want them,” said Starling. “The dust of ages would accumulate on Mrs. Naseby before I took her down again. She is talking scandal to Polly Harbord. I know by the way her under lip shoots in and out.”

Madge laughed outright, and then, remembering Mr. Livingston’s eulogium, blushed, to his greater pleasure. She looked away from him, conscious of his enjoyment, and her eyes encountered those of her late adversary and Starling’s partner. At the first glance she thought him the handsomest man she had ever seen, but then her experience was limited to a small country town in England, and the voyage out, during which she had been too ill to get to know one third of the passengers.

“I wonder who he is?” she thought, while her eyes still met his. Something passed between them,— she did not know what,—some recognition of a mutual attraction that seemed even in that first minute to have been of long duration. And it was just then that



Starling said : " Well, you have been a long while ! I hope you made a good tea," very sarcastically, and added, " Captain Truman, — Miss Cunningham," which distracted Madge's attention.

" I have heard of you so often," she collected herself to say, as she shook hands.

" Why ? " asked the newcomer, gently. He still held her fingers in his and smiled at her out of a most expressive pair of eyes. He was totally unlike what Madge had expected, being short and broad-shouldered, while she had thought he would be dapper and weedy. His features were good, and his face much sunburnt, but his eyes were undoubtedly his attraction. They could, and did, say anything, and his quick soft voice only echoed their sentiments.

" Your friends are always speaking of you," said Madge.

" I hope they were kind."

" I don't think they were unkind. But they gave me an erroneous impression, all the same."

" I will give you a chance to correct it as much as you like. Will you play the next set with me ? "

" Ah, you come too late ! I have just played with Mr. Livingston."

" Later on then. We can go and sit down together and watch this game. Then you will begin to find out what I am really like."

" I am finding out now. Are you aware that you are still holding my hand ? "

" Yes ; I was just thinking how nice it was of you to leave it there. It was quite comfortable, was n't it ? "

" Well, really ! " Madge said rather breathlessly.

" It does n't matter what I do, you know. I don't count."

" So I hear. I am rather glad. It must be so nice."

He nodded. " It *is* nice. Will you come and sit

down with me now? I am sure you are tired after playing. Or would you like some more tea?"

"No, I would rather sit down."

"Miss Cunningham and I are going to find out what each other are like," Truman explained to Starling. "She says you gave her a wrong impression of me." He set straight a tumbled piece of lace on her gown as he spoke, with a little familiar movement that made Madge laugh.

"I see you do *not* count," she said.

"No, he really does n't," Starling agreed. "Find Miss Cunningham a seat then, True. I have got to arrange the next set."

"Have you been out here long?" True asked as he led the way to a rustic bench. "Wait a minute,—let me alter the cushions for you."

"About a week. Thank you! What a nice nurse you would make!"

"Yes. I think of taking it up in my leisure moments. Do you want one?"

"For myself?"

"Yes."

"I don't know. I think I would rather try you first,—in your leisure moments!"

"Very well. I won't forget. You have n't told me how you like Africa."

"Very much, just now," said Margery, thinking of her household trials and not of the implied compliment to him. "I have had a lot of bother with the servants, but I hope I shall get straight soon. The house is in such a hopeless muddle."

"Where do you live? Vine Lodge? I am just near, at the Camp. May I come in and help you sometimes. I know how to put up curtains."

"Do you? I should be only too thankful! Mrs. Drysdale is coming to-morrow morning."

"I can't come to-morrow morning—we are going

route marching. But I'll turn up in the afternoon, if I may."

"Will you really? I should be very pleased. Do you — do you know my brother?"

"Yes." He smiled into her eyes reassuringly. "He does n't mind me. Nobody does. I'll come to-morrow then."

Margery remembered this promise when she was leaving in the train of Mrs. Drysdale, and she turned to Starling half apologetically. "Captain Truman says he will come and help me put up curtains," she said.

"Oh, will he?" said Starling, easily. A group of people who were leaving were standing all round them laughing and talking. Starling turned with a smile from Beau Livingston, and the smile deepened as she looked at Margery. "That is all right," she said. "Captain Truman is a splendid carpenter. You will find him really useful — we all give him jobs to do."

The momentary doubt in Margery's eyes was dispelled, and she heaved a sigh of relief. At home she had not been used to an acquaintance of half an hour offering to put up her window curtains, particularly if he were a captain in the army. But here it seemed the usual thing. She looked at True's face, and thought his friendly offer of his services a pleasant change from conventionality. And he, chancing to look at her at the moment, continued a wordless flirtation for a few minutes by his own private code of glances. Margery would have found his gaze embarrassing if she had been in a mood to think of anything seriously. But the sunlight poured down its generous gold upon the open drive where they were all standing; it lay in warm patches on Starling's brown head, and her own white gown; and it warmed the wide steps and the doors of Friedenhof above them, and Johnnie Dodd, who, like the household deity, stood beaming a farewell blessing upon his guests; its influ-



ence derided a serious thought. The careless lightness of the talk and laughter round her seemed to float away into the element of the sunshine like thistledown, until the nonsense and the brightness of the moment were the only things of importance, and nothing was serious in the whole world.

"I wonder," said Madge to herself, "if it is always so light? I seem to have drifted into the air and lost my feet. I am like a creature sunning itself, and only conscious of the present warmth. But how lovely to be young, and to live in the sunshine!"

## CHAPTER II

*"Oh, the days were so sunny, the skies were so blue, and the apples  
so readily fell to the hand  
Of the beautiful women who once were so pure, as they wandered  
like Eve in Bohemia's land!  
There was something so tender and true in the voice of the Ser-  
pent who glided and bask'd under leaves  
Concealing the fruit that a minute destroys, and a lifetime of  
misery never retrieves!  
There were kisses in plenty, and jewels galore, and deep-scented  
flowers to twine in the hair  
Of the woman who drank up her joy at a draught, and galloped  
on Pleasure through Vanity Fair."*

"MAY I come in?" said a voice.

Madge dropped the work from her hands, and went to welcome her visitor, who was standing on the stoep.

"Yes, do!" she said. "Lean the bicycle up against the steps, Miss Harbord. Now sit down in that easy-chair and talk."

Polly Harbord did as suggested, and sat down, looking round her with bright interested eyes. To do her justice she was always interested in her surroundings, — a lovable quality that had something to do with her popularity. Margery Cunningham had made the acquaintance of many girls in the past three weeks, but of them all she inclined mostly to Starling Dodd and the girl now before her. Polly was always ready to laugh, and for that matter to gossip, but she had such a way of combining the two that it was difficult to take her tales of the neighbourhood seriously. She looked, in her smart cycling dress, the impersonation of youth and enjoyment and good temper. The sunshine was dancing in her eyes, and the carelessness of Wynberg on her lips. Yet she held the position of companion to a

hypochondriac elderly lady who spoiled her enjoyments as often as not, and would have embittered the lives of nine girls out of ten. Some of the African sunshine must certainly have been absorbed into Polly Harbord's very being.

"What an improvement it is, having this room to sit in!" she said.

"I had a hard fight to get leave. Anthony never used it, but that was no reason to his mind that I should. I like sitting here much better than in the dining-room, — that is so depressing. Oh, if you could have seen the house the first day that Mrs. Drysdale found me crying in the dust and dirt! It looked hopeless to me then, and even now I can hardly understand how I have got it as straight as it is."

"You have altered things wonderfully — yourself included, if you don't mind my saying so."

"Not a bit!" said Madge, frankly. "I don't wonder you think so. I shall never forget my first introduction to you all — I had been so miserable, and you all seemed so happy! I have caught the contagion a little myself now, I think."

"I wonder what you thought of us? I often wonder how we strike a 'tender-foot.'"

"You ought to say an Oitlander, it's the same thing, is n't it? Let me think! I have got to know you all so well since, that I can't remember. My head was full of Mr. Livingston and True when I got home, and I thought a good deal about Starling. I hardly spoke to any one else."

"Is n't True a good sort! I suppose he is a flirt, but not a dangerous one — like Beau for instance."

"True is a darling! But I don't think there is any harm in Mr. Livingston, is there? He has been awfully kind to me from the first."

"You have n't known him very long, have you," said Polly, dryly. "But I don't say there is any harm in



him, exactly —" She looked at Madge's face, and the explanation did not come. Some day people would be less reticent. "Let her find out for herself," Polly thought shrewdly.

"How is Mrs. Wrighton this morning?" asked Madge, as she went on stitching at the covers which she was making for the cushions.

"Better. She is always better on Mondays, because Dr. Langdon has to go into Cape Town to the Hospital that day, and she knows that she can't send for him. I often think what a nice scandal I could make if I chose! He goes up to her own room and stays there any amount of time with no one else by — I'm supposed to go up too to take his instructions, but I know I'm not wanted, and I've learned to hunt out former prescriptions downstairs until five minutes before he leaves."

Madge put down the cushion hastily, and drew back. "I don't think you ought to say that sort of thing!" she said, flushing with the effort, and speaking very gently. "It is horrid!"

"Well, I *don't* say it — that is just the point. I could set half Wynberg by the ears with the things I hear and practically know to be true. But what's the good? The women are all alike out here, and the men get their diversions in Cape Town."

"Madge!" called a querulous voice from somewhere in the back regions of the house. "Madge! — why can't you hear me? I want you!"

"Oh, run along, for goodness' sake, or he'll be in a fever!" said Polly, with a laugh that was perfectly undisturbed. "Give him my love, and tell him not to be stuffy! — that's slang for bad temper."

For once Madge was glad of her brother's summons, though it heralded a reprimand for sins of omission and commission, of which she felt herself guiltless. He further garnished the interview, — whose real ob-

ject was a mislaid article of clothing, for which Madge did not feel herself responsible, — by a comment upon the bicycle leaning against the steps of the stoep which he could see from his laboratory windows, and several disagreeable remarks as to the number of visitors who came to the house and increased the house-keeping bills. It was his money, and she seemed to think —

Madge threw her chin up. "It is Miss Harbord. But I have not given her anything to eat or drink, so that is sixpence saved," she said. "I rarely do when people drop in like this."

By the time she got back to the morning-room, Polly had strolled out into the garden and had taken her bicycle preparatory to leaving. "I must be getting back," she said, "or Mrs. Wrighton will want me. It is a curious thing that I may sit for hours in the house, and she never requires my presence at all, but if I go out for half an hour, she always rings the bell, and is injured that the servant cannot find me."

She rode off in the sunshine, and Madge wandered down into the vineyard, instead of returning to the house, and sat down in the rustic arbour to eat grapes. It was brilliantly hot this March day, though the summer was on the wane, and she sunned herself as joyously as a cat. Before her stretched the rows of bobbly round vines weighted to the warm dry earth with golden-green grapes; they touched the limit of the ground belonging to Vine Lodge, and were shut in by a high hedge of hackia. On the other side of the hedge was a little private road leading up to the Camp; it was not supposed to be used by ordinary foot-passengers, but the gates of Vine Lodge, which would have shut it off from the more public highway, were always open, and whoever chose to go that way might do so. Madge got up from her seat in the arbour after a while, and pushed her way through a gap in the hedge into

this lane. On the other side of the lane was another vineyard belonging to a neighbour, and at the bottom of the hill — for the vines grew on a slope — was a small stream. There were arum lilies growing down by that stream, as Madge had discovered. They grew wild in the swampy ground which they liked, and the Natives called them pig-lilies, and threw them literally as pearls before the swine, who ate their roots. It would be trespassing, but they were of no value, and Madge liked them in vases about the drawing-room; should she go across the vine-clad hillside and steal the arums? A bugle rang out sweetly across the sunny land, and she hesitated. It was the dishing-up call:

“Officers’ wives get puddings and pies,  
And soldiers’ wives get skilly!”

surely there would be time before luncheon was on the table, and Anthony came back from his beetles, in a rage, to eat it.

As she stood there hesitating, she heard the sound of horses’ hoofs, and two horsemen riding down the lane caused her to back into her own domains. She stood in the gap in the hedge and watched them. One was a man she knew slightly — a certain Captain Barton, “Teddy Barton, of the Gunners,” said Wynberg. Madge nodded to him, and he lifted his cap and called out a salutation. The other man she did not know — and yet she did. As she looked from Barton to his companion, who was riding on the off side, she remembered her first introduction to Wynberg society, and the man who had played tennis with Starling against her and Livingston. She had not been introduced to him that day, though while they had all talked together he had made several remarks which she had answered in the general conversation; she had never met him since, and had not asked who he was in the first instance, because she knew she thought him

very handsome, and he had looked at her, and their eyes had met ; at any rate, her reasons were inexplicably feminine. In the excitement of seeing more and more new people during the past three weeks, the incident had passed from her mind. She retained her impressions of Beau Livingston and True, because she met them, time after time, and improved their acquaintance. This man, riding with Teddy Barton, she had never seen again until now. He turned in his saddle and looked back at her, past Barton. Madge knew it, but she did not look at him until he had passed. Then she cast a glance searching enough at his big figure in its riding dress, the fair hair shaved closely to the thick tanned neck, and at every detail a woman's eye could note.

"I will ask Starling who he is," she thought. "He is very nice, and his clothes are all right." Then she blushed furiously, and laughed at herself, and the sunshine laughed too, and danced about her hair, until it looked as if a little of its priceless gold had got entangled in a mesh of spider's webbing.

The man in question had turned to Teddy Barton as soon as they were out of hearing.

"Is n't that Cunningham's house?" he said.

"Yes, and that 's Cunningham's sister," said Barton, smoothing his moustache. "That 's their vineyard to our left over the hedge. It's the best about here — beats the Drysdales' hollow."

"I wonder Cunningham leaves that gap in the hedge," remarked Barton's companion. "Any one might get in and steal his — grapes."

"I dare say the Kaffirs will, but as long as Cunningham does n't know of it, it won't matter," said Barton, carelessly. He was thinking more of the white gown by the gap in the hedge, than of the Professor's grapes. Perhaps his companion was also. But he only smiled, as if he saw a good joke that he could not share.



There was a Field Day, on the morrow after Polly Harbord's flying visit to Madge, and Starling sent round a note to Vine Lodge in the morning to say that she was going to drive out to the Flats and see if she could catch sight of the manoeuvres; she would call for Madge, if she liked to go. Madge did like, and when Starling came she found her ready — as, indeed, she would have been for any sort of entertainment.

"I have promised to pick up Mr. Livingston, if I see him on the road," she said. "That is why I brought the spider and not the dog cart. It is not so nice, but he won't interfere with us much, as we sit at the back."

"Oh, I am very glad you did," said Madge, generously. "I like him, you know. How amusing he is!"

"Yes, and so very much at anybody's disposal. He is a great convenience if one wants an escort in a hurry. One can be quite sure that he will never have a business engagement to prevent him, at any rate."

"Who is he? He never does anything!"

"No. He is well off, I suppose. He says that he is rich enough to be idle, but not to work. The one only requires credit, and the other capital. When he first came out here, on account of his health, he was staying at Government House, and he liked Africa so well that he said he felt he must be under a delusion, and he should stay to find out how soon it became detestable. That is two years ago."

"He does not dislike it yet, then!"

"No. He went to Groot Schuur for a time, because he knows Mr. Rhodes, and Groot Schuur is a kind of private hotel for all Mr. Rhodes' friends. The only thing he will not do is to go there and entertain them himself. Mr. Livingston has been Home twice — but he always comes back."

"I don't wonder! I think this is a delightful place. I feel as if there could n't be any very great trouble

here — at all events for long. At least not trouble of one's own making. Every one seems to live just to enjoy themselves ! ”

“ How about the men in business ? ”

“ Yes, they work, of course — but they enjoy themselves, too, don't they ? And then so many of them round here have made their money and retired. ”

“ It does seem rather Arcadian — on the surface, ” Starling agreed. “ And then, you see, it is all new to you. ”

“ I hope it won't ever lose its niceness. I can't fancy any one doing anything wicked here, — I can't fancy them serious enough ! That was what struck me that first day. Every one was so light-hearted, — just as if it were the sunshine affecting them. Oh, Starling, I meant to ask you — who was that man who played tennis with you that afternoon ? ”

“ I don't remember. I thought I played with True ? ”

“ No, he had gone back to the house to have tea. The man I mean is much older than Captain Truman, and big and fair. I have never met him since, but I saw him riding yesterday morning. ”

“ Oh, I remember now, of course. It was Major Vibart — the Duke's Major. He has been out for a fortnight's shooting, I think. I haven't seen him myself for some time. ” Starling paused, and added slowly, “ He isn't a very reputable character. ”

“ Oh ! ” said Madge. She did not in the least understand the last clause, but she translated it as meaning that Major Vibart was fast, and she thought that he had looked rather like that, and that it made him none the less interesting. The word “ fast ” conveys one thing to the ignorance of twenty — quite another to the experience of ten years later. It is not a pretty word rightly translated. It leads to gout and crow's-feet rather than Byronic repentance.

“ I don't exactly know why I should say that either, ”

said Starling, in her soft little voice, for she cooed like a wood-pigeon. "He has never been anything but most pleasant to me, nor have I ever known him do anything ungentlemanly. It is only his reputation. But I suppose he must have acquired that somehow."

"I daresay it is because he is so handsome," thought Madge, sensibly. "The other men are jealous, or else the women think he must be bad because he really is unusually good to look at."

"There is Mr. Livingston!" said Starling, pointing at a cool grey figure sauntering along the road before them. They were driving in the direction of Rondesbosch, along a road like the aisle of a cathedral. Stem within stem stood the firs, betraying by their symmetrical lines that Man planted them, and not Nature, whose imagination never measures an equal space between tree and tree. The branches almost met overhead, and shut out the hot blue sky, except for the brilliant triangles and lozenges of colour that peeped through. Beau Livingston was standing in the shade as they drew up, gazing through the narrow belt of trees to the open ground beyond, through his field-glasses.

"I have spotted the enemy!" he said; "but not the Duke's. The Wessex are the enemy to-day. How do you do, Miss Cunningham? And how are you getting on under your own vine-and-fig-tree-lodge roof? Shall I sit in front, Starling?"

"Please—and tell John where to go. I want to see as much of it as possible."

"Then I think we will drive on about a hundred yards, and leave the trap in the road while we reconnoitre, if you don't mind." He gave his directions to the black boy who was driving, and then turned round and sat with his arm over the back of the seat to look at the two bright faces behind him.

"So you like Wynberg!" he said quietly to Madge.

"I knew you would. It is a change from your English country town, isn't it?"

"How do you know that I lived in an English country town?"

"Pf! I know all your back history. You have been telling it to me ever since I met you. You lived in a country town with occasional visits to London which you very much enjoyed, and thought very delightful. And the only animals of the opposite sex whom you encountered were leggy boys, and old men who ought to have known better."

"Oh, do go on!" Madge said, as well as she could for laughing. "It is all quite true!"

"Of course it is quite true! I particularly appreciate the fact that you know what I mean when I say they ought to have known better. Did they all come to the point?"

"No, of course not. I mean I don't know what you mean."

"I do like winter sunsets!" said Beau, with a soft sigh of enjoyment. "To proceed — was your father a doctor, by the way?"

"Yes, but he died many years ago. I am an orphan."

"I am perfectly aware of that — especially upon the mother's side."

"What do you mean?"

"If you had had a mother she would have told you — many things. As it is, you are blissfully unwise. Where was I? Oh, at your orphanage. The world has not been a bad foster-mother to you, on the whole, has it?"

"Everybody has been very kind — particularly when they were not my relations," said Madge, thoughtfully.

"Exactly. How like relations! They are things I never have myself. Miss Cunningham, I have told you your past. You alone can tell your present — which is,



after all, the only thing that matters — in such perfect weather."

"I think I should like to get out here," said Starling, patiently. "I am so afraid that if we don't you will go on talking!"

John had pulled up in the curve of the road. Beyond them the trees ran out like a thin streamer which ended on open ground. Across the broken country, a line of dust-coloured figures crept here and there — sometimes revolving itself into a string of pygmies with Liliputian muskets in their hands, as the men showed up against the skyline. In a hollow not twenty yards away was a group of Staff officers — whether the attacking force or the enemy, Livingston said he could not tell. The men sat motionless in their saddles in the shade of a clump of trees; every now and then a horse grew impatient, and was reined back and turned round, jingling his bridle. Then the sunshine flashed on the steel and the gold, or caught the glitter of lace and the hilt of a sword. Otherwise it had the arrested motion of a photographic scene.

"How large it all is! Those men look like dolls!" Madge said, as they made their way through the plantation, and stood on the outskirts overlooking the Staff officers in the hollow.

"That is Wyniard of the R. A. M. C. on the white horse," said Livingston. "He has seen us, and is coming out."

A big man in khaki was making his way towards them. He drew up and saluted, and Livingston went up to him and stood at his bridle rein.

"Whatever fat dray-horse have you got onto, Wyniard!" he said in his clear voice. "I never saw such a beast! He looks like a beer-barrel finished off with a fiddle for a head."

"He is rather a crank. Makes a good show though to any one who doesn't know. He belongs to the

Mounted Infantry, really. That's the way Government serves us. How are you, Miss Dodd?"

"Very dissatisfied that I can't see more of the battle at present. What are you all doing?"

"Waiting for the enemy. They're hiding below that hill we think. There go our men!"

He turned in his saddle at the sound of dropping shots. The figures on the skyline ran forward, halted, fired, and ran again.

"In full sight and range!" remarked Livingston. "What are they thinking of, Wyniard? They must be just as good a mark for the Wessex, as they are for us!"

"No, — they have the trees behind them from the enemy's ground. But that open order might have been better done. Vibart must have been bouncing in his saddle! There, he is sending some one out to ask what they are playing at."

"Is Jack in Command? I have n't seen him since he came home. Did he have good sport?"

"I have n't heard." He slipped out of the saddle and stood beside the great grey horse. "By Jove! I am hot! I don't suppose there will be any casualties for me to attend to, so I'll take it easy for a few minutes."

He hitched his horse up to a tree out of sight of the Staff, and threw himself on the ground beside Starling.

"When it comes to war, we shall see the value of field days," he said. "We have made about ten mistakes this morning already, and we shall make exactly the same next time. A real enemy could have crumpled us up."

"Is the General there?"

"One of 'em is, and Vibart and Scott Murray, and two or three A. D. C.'s, to say nothing of Me. Oh, the Staff is beautifully efficient!"

"I wonder if we should see more round the other side? We are so far off here. I want to get into the thick of it."

"There isn't much to get into, but you might try to drive round that hill. Will your pony stand the firing?"

"Oh, yes. Come along, Madge, I am going into the battle. There go the Staff!"

Madge turned and looked after them as they rode away in the sun. She had recognised Major Vibart.

"We must get round quickly and catch them up, if we are to see anything," said Livingston, as he helped the two girls into the spider again. "They have got a good start. Shall I take the reins, Starling?"

"Yes, if you like. But don't turn us into the road, and remember that Lollo may shy at the firing, though I don't think he will."

Livingston changed places with the Kaffir boy, and the trap flew. It swung from side to side as the pony tore down the road, and Madge laughed with excitement as they cut dangerously short to their left, and skirting the open land, raced the Staff which they could still see galloping across the burnt grass. It was like flying under a bright blue sky with the black firs and then the small white houses flashing past in procession through their headlong race. The pony came to a standstill, panting, in a narrow road at the end of which Livingston had caught sight of a small detachment, though whether it were the enemy or not he could not say. Starling panted a little too, when she found herself safe.

"You are so reckless!" she said to Livingston, indignantly. "If you don't value your own life, you might think of ours. I hope you were not very frightened, Madge?"

"I liked it," Madge confessed. Her eyes were shining and dilated, and the wind had tossed her misty hair about her face. "I liked the excitement — and I never thought of the danger!"

"Of course not," said Livingston, coolly. "It would

spoil the enjoyment if one were always looking on the reverse side of the picture. Besides, as long as the excitement lasts, the danger does not matter. But you were really quite safe, Starling !”

“Safety seems to lie in the opinion of the subject !” retorted Starling, dryly.

“Most things exist only in our opinion of them. Hush ! This must be the end of the entertainment, for the General is going to speak.” He backed Lollo a little, and they sat in the shade and listened. They could hear the General’s voice, but his words were frequently lost as he had his back to them.

“Some one is getting a wiggling,” said Livingston, with keen enjoyment. “Look at Forrester’s face ! He has just been called out for special criticism. I should n’t wonder if he led that last attack.”

“Can they see us from here ?” whispered Madge.

“Not to matter. Besides we have a perfect right to be in the public road. By Jove ! they are coming this way !”

It was too late to drive on in front, so they sat there helplessly, while the Staff rode past, and then the Duke’s and the Wessex. Starling leaned back with some annoyance in her face as one man after another saluted her, but Madge was trying not to laugh. She had met and played tennis with several of the men riding past her soberly in khaki, but had never seen them in uniform before, and her easily roused amusement threatened to bubble over.

“How funny and sweet True looks in his helmet,” she thought, glancing along the line. Their eyes met, and he smiled as he raised his hand, while Madge nodded gaily. Then her eyes danced back along the line, and she caught the glance of the man at that moment passing the trap. It was Vibart. Madge tried to look away, horrified to find that merely to meet his eyes now made her blush with more than her usual facility.



"I wish I had never looked away from True," she thought. "He is so safe. What must Major Vibart think of me? That I am an idiotic little schoolgirl, if he recognises me at all, I suppose."

"Old Jack looks a fine figure in uniform," remarked Livingston, as he drove gently homewards in the wake of the soldiers. "You know Vibart, Miss Cunningham?"

"No — not exactly. I mean I met him that first day I met you, but I've never spoken to him directly."

"Ah,— I see!" Livingston's eyes sparkled. "You will like him. He is a friend of mine, and a charming fellow."

Starling looked at Madge, and then at Livingston. "It is a great misfortune that his wife should be so afflicted" she said in a tone impossible to translate.

"My dear Starling, you speak rather as if Vibart were the affliction. You really ought to explain a little further, or you will leave Miss Cunningham under a mistaken impression. Vibart's wife is in an asylum, Miss Cunningham. She is not despaired of by the doctors, but there does not seem much chance of her getting any better. It is rarely mentioned now, and Jack gets the reputation of being an improper bachelor who won't marry because of Don Juan tendencies. In reality, he is that most unenviable thing, a husband with no available wife."

"Oh, poor fellow!" Madge said involuntarily. Livingston smiled. Starling looked at him again, but said nothing.

They were nearing Vine Lodge, trotting down the very road into which its never closed gates opened, and Madge's face clouded ominously as she sighted her own home. She had almost forgotten her first week in Africa through which she had cried her way to Mrs. Drysdale's acquaintance, except when she was reminded of it by the atmosphere of Vine Lodge. She was

pluckily doing her best to make her brother's household move on oiled wheels, but she looked to the outside world for distraction and relief from his irascible temper.

"Has your brother got you a pony yet?" said Livingston, as they set her down at the gate, and he shook hands with her.

"No, but he really said something about my having one." (What the Professor had really said was, "As you are learning, I suppose you ought to have a horse of your own. It was n't worth while when you would only have bumped about on the saddle and looked a fool—for I certainly was not going to take you out with me at that stage! However, I don't care to have you always sponging on the Dodds, so I'll think about it.") "How good of you it was to speak about it to him!"

"Pf! a little plain speaking did him no harm. I am not afraid of Cunningham, or any other beetle-hunter! I wish he would take to hunting fleas, by the way; he should have the first pick of all my clean shirts. Those Malays have a fine assortment. Oh, Miss Cunningham, stop a minute! Here's Vibart!"

Margery paused and turned round to see a horse stopping beside the spider, and Major Vibart shaking hands with Starling. He was still in uniform, as her shy eyes testified. She hardly liked to look up as Livingston introduced them and the Major saluted.

"How much nicer that is than when men lift their hats," she thought. "I feel like the Queen."

"I have just got rid of the General, and am going to my own place to change," said the Major. "I am afraid it was a poor show this morning, Miss Dodd."

"Oh, we were very much entertained!" said Starling, demurely.

"I am afraid you were—how unkind you can be sometimes! I saw you flying along the road in hot

pursuit of the enemy. I think you would make most efficient scouts."

"That was Mr. Livingston's fault. I believe he meant to kill us. It was a marvel that we didn't go over."

"Miss Dodd is a coward," said Livingston, in his peculiar, clear voice. "Miss Cunningham is much braver. She likes the excitement, and she does not think of the danger."

The two men laughed in concert, and Margery wondered what she had said to amuse them. "Well," she began, and looked up under her lashes at Vibart and pouted.

"It is n't true, is it, Miss Cunningham? You were just as frightened as anybody."

"I wasn't frightened until the thing was done. Then, when Lollo stood still, I had time to think, and — we did come rather fast!"

"What a shocking confession!" Livingston said, lightly. "That I should live to be described as fast! Vibart, my dear fellow, do I dine with you to-night?"

"I hope so. You have been pledged for some days."

"Oh, is it guest-night?" said Margery, eagerly. "I am so glad! Then I shall hear the band."

"Can you hear it at Vine Lodge?" Vibart asked.

"Yes, if I go out on the stoep. My brother goes to sleep after dinner, and I am so glad when the band plays. It is so dull to sit and watch a person getting through all the stages of going to sleep!"

Both men looked at her in open amusement. "Why didn't you send for me?" said Livingston, and his eyes danced. "I would have brought my fancy-work and sat with you."

"But oh!" said Margery, laughing, "what would happen if Anthony woke up!"

"Let him wake up! What is a garden for? What a shrubbery? Before I would be caught the Professor

would have to be keener than he is on a spider ! — but we are putting most immoral ideas into your head, and I perceive that Starling is horrified."

"Not at all — I am resigned. I am only wondering if you will have ceased talking nonsense in time to let me get home to luncheon."

"After that," said Vibart, lightly, "there remains nothing for us to do but take our leave. Good-bye, Miss Cunningham ;" he walked his horse round the spider to Madge, where she stood by the gate. "I would rather say, *Au revoir*," he added in a lower tone.

Madge put her hand into his, laughed nervously to herself over the pressure it received, and ran down the drive.

"Really," Livingston said, as he settled himself again in the spider, "Cunningham ought not to leave his sister about loose like this. If I were he, a sense of my responsibility would keep me painfully awake — even after dinner."

"The Professor probably thinks that his own grounds should be safe enough for his household," said Starling, with the soft petulance in her voice of an angry wood-pigeon. "If you will consider a moment I think you will see that it is so."

"But there is always the open gate," said Livingston, with a wave of his hand towards the proof of his words.

"And the gap in the hedge," Vibart added to himself as he rode away.

Starling turned her face from her companion and did not continue the conversation. Livingston had taken Margery's empty seat beside her, and after two minutes of the silence, the red road, and the green hedges, he spoke.

"Is this dignified ignoring of my existence intentional, Starling?"

"Not particularly. I was thinking."



"That I am a most annoying person?"

"That you are rather undependable."

"Were you really vexed with me for driving hard to-day? Surely you knew that there was no danger! I would not have risked a hair of your head —"

"I know, of course, that you think there was no danger. I object to reckless driving personally, and I object to letting my friends undergo it. You did not know that Miss Cunningham was not an intensely nervous girl. If it had been Edith Hofman she might have tried to jump out."

"When you are indignant, Star, and catch your breath like that, you are like a little bird ruffling up its feathers. You never could do anything but peck, however angry you were, and your voice would always be pretty and soft."

He spoke as coolly as ever, but the brilliancy of his eyes altered as they rested on her face. They tried to look tender, and succeeded in looking sensual. Starling shrank in the shadow of the back seat, and drew her hand away from his as it touched her — no more. Polly Harbord had said — but it did not matter.

"I don't want my peculiarities inventoried, thank you," she said sturdily. Starling always knew her own mind. "My objection to you to-day is mainly that you said certain things to Margery Cunningham which were totally unnecessary, — and you said them before Major Vibart. I do not care for Major Vibart, though I do not wish to say anything against him. But, you know, in his Regiment, they call him 'the Tracker' — and you know why."

She jumped down at her own gate and held out her hand. "Good-bye," she said simply. "John will drive you home. Yes, please — it is too hot for any one to walk, and it will not take him five minutes." She gave herself a little shake as she went into the house, as though she settled her plumage. "I am glad I said

that to him — he ought n't to have spoken as he did. It was time I pulled him up. The sunshine and the intimacy and the licence here make the men careless. I know it means nothing — summer weather and propinquity and idleness — that is all. But — I wonder what would have happened if I had left my hand there?" She frowned a little. Starling was not much older than Margery, but she had learned a great deal more in the same time.

"It does n't matter — but all the same it does," she said to herself. "We are all so careless that we drift, and it seems silly to make a fuss over a little thing, so it grows, and before one knows, people gossip. And Polly Harbord says —"

### CHAPTER III

*"The Book of Life begins with a Man and a Woman in a Garden . . . and it ends with Revelations."*

"SHALL I go round to the stables and ask your man for a ladder?" said True. "It is a pity to leave that hanging branch — if the wind gets up it will be broken."

He was standing beside Margery in the drive, looking up at the climbing roses which were trained up the pillars of the stoep and along the balcony.

"Yes, I wish you would — do you mind?" she said. "Robert ought to do it, but Anthony sends him on so many errands that he has hardly time to attend to the garden. You will find the ladder in the coachhouse. I want that rose to grow all along the balcony — it looks so pretty from my windows! Do you think it will?"

"Are those your windows?"

"Yes, overhead. Is n't it a Juliet balcony? I think you ought to come and serenade me one night?"

"I will bring the big drum," said True, serenely. "It is the only instrument that I can play."

"Have you ever played it?"

"Yes — the other day when we were coming home from a long march. They trained the Rifles, and they made us walk. And the men were tired. So to amuse them, I went in front and took the drum. I played them back to Camp. They quite forgot to be tired, they were so interested in watching me."

"How you do love your men, True!"

He smiled without answering. "Shall I get the ladder?" he suggested in his quick, handy fashion.

"We will do our best to make that rose grow as you want it."

"*You* will do your best, you mean. I shall probably look on." She sat down contentedly on the edge of the stoep in the sunshine, her eyes resting dreamily on the sunny green land all round her, which looked warm and sleepy in the afternoon light. Half an hour later Mrs. Drysdale, coming up the drive, laughed at the tableau, — True on the ladder, nailing up the rose, and Margery sitting at the foot, her elbows on her knees and her chin in her hands.

"I knew True was here when I saw the ladder," she said, sitting down beside Margery. "All right, Captain Truman, you need n't come down. Go on with your work, and I will talk to Madge."

"He dropped in half an hour ago," Margery said, with a nod at True. "And I always set him to work when he comes. It is the easiest way of entertaining him."

"Did you go to the Field-day manœuvres yesterday?"

"Yes, Starling and Mr. Livingston and I. I do like Mr. Livingston! He amuses me so."

"He is an old fraud! But, yes, he is amusing. I have just left him at Friedenhof. He said he should come on here and fetch me."

"The way that people drop in on you here is delightful!" Margery said with a long sigh of pleasure. "It makes things so friendly, and I have got to know every one round here quite well. Why, I call Captain Truman 'True' already — and I am sure I ought not to."

"Why should n't you? Every one does. And besides True does n't count. If I heard you calling Mr. Forrester, Pete, I should advise you not perhaps."

"Oh, but of course I should n't do that! I don't know why, but one never gets to know Mr. Forrester. He is very nice socially, and I like talking to him — but I never want to know him any better. He is quite satisfactory as he is."



"He is represented in most people's minds by his knack of saying clever things — or things that sound clever. But there really is more of him than that, and I am not sure that it is a nice more. He tells a very good story ; but unfortunately he has grown so used to doing so that if the story is not good of itself he improves upon it. He will not allow his reputation to suffer for the sake of verity. Don't always believe him."

"I don't think I do. He just amuses me — I hardly listen. Mrs. Drysdale, I have been thinking that I should so like to have some tennis afternoons here. Do you think I could?"

"Why not? It is a charming house, and now you have got it into order it looks very nice. Your court is a good one too, I know. Is your brother the objection?"

"I am afraid he would make some, anyhow!"

"I wonder if I could manage him? It is wonderful how much more easy other women find it to manage our brothers than we do ourselves. And perhaps True can help."

"What is that in which I can help, Lady?" asked True, as he descended the ladder and stood in front of them. "The rose is all right. When it has grown a little more, I will tie it up again."

"Why, Margery wants to start tennis here, and is afraid of the Professor. How you are advancing, Madge! I can hardly recognise in you the tear-stained individual of three weeks ago."

"Please don't! What a little fool I was! But I was very miserable."

"I found her weeping bitterly because the furniture would not arrange itself, and the servants would not work, and the Professor stormed," Mrs. Drysdale explained to True.

His large eyes rested on the vexed crimson of Mar-

gery's face with a beautiful concern. "Was it as bad as that?" he said softly. "I wish I had known."

"Why? You could n't have done anything."

"I could have cried too."

"Are you going to give us tea, Madge?" Mrs. Drysdale said as she rose. "I think I ought to get home."

"I told them to put it outside the morning-room, on the stoep."

Mrs. Drysdale slipped her arm into the girl's, and they walked round the house together, while Truman took the ladder back to the stables. "Is your brother at home?" Mrs. Drysdale asked musingly. "Does he ever come to tea?"

"Oh, yes, often. But he reads the paper most of the time. I tried to talk to him at first, but he said he would rather I held my tongue. If I had nothing worth saying I was only annoying him for nothing."

"Does he generally make such pretty speeches?"

"Yes, generally."

"Yet he can be as pleasant as possible. There is a good deal of difference in your ages, is n't there?"

"Nearly twenty-five years."

"He is old enough to be your father! What made you come out to him?"

"It was Anthony's own suggestion, and as he is the moneyed member of the family, his words have weight. He wanted some one to keep house for him, and he said he could give me a home instead of my earning my living in any other way. His letter was not particularly kind, but it was very uncontrovertible. I think sensible people are very trying, don't you?"

"They make mistakes too, sometimes, like the silliest. I wonder your brother had you out like this. A minute's thought would have suggested to him that a girl of twenty is not an automatic machine to be applied to fill a long felt want, and to be instantly satisfactory — especially in Africa. She will possibly grow, and

inevitably gain experience. And it may not be confined to housekeeping." Mrs. Drysdale appeared to be musing aloud. Then she turned to Margery more directly. "Do you like the Colony, Madge?"

"Yes, I do, very much. I love the sunshine; I am a regular pagan! I should like to worship Apollo. And then there is so much more doing here than there was at home. And, in spite of Anthony, I go out far more. I do like to enjoy myself!"

"You are an honest little person, and it is quite natural. Here comes your brother with True!"

The Professor did not read the paper while he drank his tea. He talked to Mrs. Drysdale, of whose long, graceful figure and taste in dress he approved. He even forbore to do more than absolutely decline to hear of it when she suggested the tennis afternoons. He was not at all rude, and he did not abuse her; he merely said that before he had any of that kind of foolery at Vine Lodge, he would shut up the house and go and live Up Country, where Society could not annoy him. This, for him, was a great self-restraint. Because if Madge had made the tennis suggestion when they were alone, he would have nagged at her for half an hour with interjections that still made her turn from white to red and bite her lips. She never could accustom herself to rough language.

"He will come to it yet," Mrs. Drysdale said to herself coolly. "When a man says 'no' as boisterously as that, he is always to be managed. Margery will give tennis parties, and dinner parties, too, before the year is out."

True had gone on talking to Margery throughout the discussion. His eyes opened wider than ever, with a troubled compassion, but he took no other notice of what the Professor and Mrs. Drysdale were saying. Margery smiled a little; her lips were still so young that they found it difficult to be bitter, but she had

learned to smile with a certain dryness of humour far removed from mirth. "Are you going to Friedenhof?" she said, as True was leaving.

"I shall pass there on my way, if you have a message?"

"Would you mind telling Starling that I would rather ride in the afternoon than the morning?"

"Yes, certainly."

Both her visitors left together, and Margery stood on the stoep to watch them depart into the sunset. The Professor had subsided into an easy-chair and the newspaper, but his ill-tempered figure was still visible behind her as they turned round at the curve of the drive to look back.

"Anthony Cunningham is a brute!" said Mrs. Drysdale, calmly. "Don't contradict me, True! I say he is a brute!"

"I don't think he means to be, Lady. It is only manner, and perhaps he has got into the habit of saying disagreeable things."

"I wish you were not so invariably charitable. You are always poking round into rubbish-heaps for stray jewels. You may poke and poke in the Professor, but beyond general nastiness, you won't find anything interesting. The worst of it is, that he is driving that little girl into outside distraction. And that is not good for any little girl out here. We must help her, True."

"Yes, Lady, I want to."

They shook hands at the open gate and parted. True turned to the left, and took the longer road to Camp that led round past Friedenhof. Mrs. Drysdale went to the right, and twenty yards farther on was overtaken by Beaumont Livingston.

"Well met!" he said gaily; "though I meant you to stay at Vine Lodge until I came; I should thus have seen two charming ladies instead of one. Miss Cunningham sent her love to me, of course?"



"If you wanted to know, you might have left Friedenhof a little sooner and come in to Vine Lodge ; as it is, you only just caught me. I am troubled about Madge," she added, as they walked on side by side. "I have just been telling True —"

"Yes, I met him. Don't tell True ; tell me. What was he doing at Vine Lodge?"

"Nailing up a creeper. Oh, that is all right ; don't be ridiculous ! Margery has been at Vine Lodge three weeks ; but the atmosphere out here has the effect of a forcing house. She might have left England three months. She is older."

"We must all leave the nursery in time. But I see no alarming symptoms in Margery. Did you ever encounter a more blooming specimen of youth and health ? I do not want to kiss many people, but I confess I always think of kisses when I look at her ! She is so nice and soft and round !"

"Don't be so terribly material ! It was not Margery's body that I was thinking of ; it was her mind. She is not growing as yet ; she is only living ! I expected her to develop."

"What—in three weeks ? And you own that she is older ! I don't see what more you could expect of her in the time. Do leave the poor child alone. She is living and expanding, like all young animals, and by-and-by she will 'develop' quite sufficiently to be disagreeable. At present she is as transparent as fine glass —"

"And as shallow !"

"Of course she is, and quite right, too ! Depths are always uncomfortable things, and to be happy as she is happy requires a skill beyond yours and mine. We lost it long since !" For a minute his face altered, and he was an elderly man. Some shadow from his eyes seemed to be reflected in Mrs. Drysdale's. They shook hands silently, and parted at her own gate.

True faithfully delivered Madge's message, and she rode with Starling the following afternoon. The Professor had not yet obtained a pony for his sister, but he was in treaty for one, and Madge looked forward to the new possession eagerly. As she turned in at her own gates, she saw a figure coming towards her down the drive, and drew rein in some surprise.

"How do you do, Major Vibart?" she said, bending down to shake hands.

"How are you?" he returned pleasantly. "I have just been to call upon you; I was sorry to find you out."

"Is Anthony out, too?"

"So your servants say. He has gone to Newlands."

"I did not know he was going. Won't you come back to the house and have some tea?" She was not quite sure that she ought to suggest it in the Professor's absence, but she was quite sure that she wanted to do so. And it was only tea, after all; tea was not like dinner! Of course she would not ask him to dinner; but True had had tea alone with her once; and — "Will you come," she said.

"Thanks — if you are going to have it?"

"Of course I am." She turned in her saddle to extricate herself from the pommel and jump down. Vibart came to the rescue before the Kaffir boy could dismount, and putting his hands on her waist, lifted her easily to the ground.

"I am always afraid to see girls jump; they so often twist their ankles," he said quietly.

"Take the ponies back, please, John," Margery said to her late escort. "And tell Miss Dodd I will be ready any time after ten to-morrow morning. Come along, Major Vibart; tea is on the stoep."

"I did not know you rode," he said, as he followed her.

"I am learning. I like it so much! Sugar?"

"Please. You were riding one of Dodd's ponies?"

"Yes; Anthony is going to get one for me, but he hasn't arranged for it yet. I am getting on quite nicely. I can trot—at last."

"I wish you would let me give you a few lessons," he said slowly. "Would you? I don't suppose your brother has much time; and I think it is really safer for you to learn with a man than with another girl. Suppose something happened?"

"But nothing has happened; and I am past the worst stage now. Thank you very much; but I am afraid —"

"You think your brother would not let you ride with me?"

Margery blushed as generously as the roses. She remembered every hint and accusation she had heard against this man, and felt small and mean in the sight of the grave blue eyes watching her. If only he had not put it in that way!

"Anthony is rather odd about things," she said breathlessly. "I don't often ask leave to do this or that, because it makes such a fuss, that's all. I wanted to have tennis here, and you can't think how cross he was! It is only because he dislikes being asked."

"Supposing I got his permission, you would have no objection to ride with me?"

"Of course not; I should be very pleased—particularly if you will finish my education," she said hastily.

"I will be a most exacting master. How long have you been out here, Miss Cunningham?"

"Oh, dear, every one asks me that! Am I so obviously new?"

"You are rather. I always think more regretfully of England after I have met you."

She looked up to laugh and say she could not see the compliment, met his eyes, and was again conscious of that strange signal between them. "What is it?" she

said inwardly. "What is it? I seem to have known him — to have almost belonged to him — ever so long ago — from the beginning."

"I have been out three weeks," she said soberly. "Not long enough to alter my excessive greenness, I suppose. I am what the Australians call a 'tenderfoot.'"

"I hope you won't lose your freshness, for all our sakes."

"I said 'greenness.'"

"And I said 'freshness.'"

Madge made him a present of another blush. She was rather prodigal of her ruddy favours in those days, but it was a habit she never entirely lost. As John Mortimer Vibart sat in his wicker chair on the stoep, where a jutting wall covered with honeysuckle made a cosy corner behind him, his eyes could rest without let or hindrance on the sun-shot cobwebs of her hair, — for she had thrown her hat aside, and the wind had ruffled her head, snare-wise, — on the curved sweep of her eyelashes with the glint of blue between them, the ingenuous tilted line of nose and upper lip and chin, all shortened and rounded with the unformed softness of youth. Under her chin the little white throat melted into the hard linen collar, and below that the severe habit made the utmost of a developing bust and slender waist. She held the habit out of her way with her left hand while she stood beside the tea-table pouring out the tea with her right. He missed no curve of her as he sat in his corner watching with the steady, devouring gaze of a beast of prey. As fresh and fragrant as the honeysuckle, as dainty and delicate as the fretted sunshine among the firs, as young and maidenly as the ripening fruit in the garden there below, — not ready to be picked as yet. Vibart looked, and coveted, much as he might have coveted the cool sweet grapes if this had been the barren and dry land where no water is, that it has the reputation of being.



"You like the Colony?" he said.

"Very much. Don't you?"

"Certainly — just now."

If he had not laughed, she might have suspected danger; as it was she laughed also. It was so good to laugh, and there could be no fear where people were merely merry. They were still laughing and talking by the tea-table when the thin, angular figure of the Professor sauntered round the house, and came up the steps, peering with prominent brown eyes to see who Madge's visitor could be. He seemed surprised to recognise Vibart, and his sister's tensely-strung nerves quivered into relief at the civility, which was almost cordiality, of his tone. She had yet to learn that the Professor differed from his Maker as much as possible in being a respecter of persons. Vibart was not only second in command, but well off in a Regiment which was notoriously poor. The Professor shook hands with him, hardly listening to Madge's hesitating explanation of his presence, and offered him a cigar.

"Will you have a whisky, Major?" he said. "I'm sure it's better for you than all that washy tanin."

"Thanks," said Vibart, carelessly. "If you are having one yourself."

"Tell the girl to bring soda and glasses, Madge," the Professor said over his shoulder. "That's the most comfortable chair, Major. Sit down and have a chat. I have n't seen a civilised being to speak to for days. I'm sorry I was out this afternoon."

Margery could hardly believe her ears. She gave the servant the requested instructions, and having seen her brother and his guest supplied with drink and smoke, slipped away to her own room to meditate.

"How nice he is!" she thought, and she was not referring to her brother. "He talks so well, and he is n't a bit silly, though he does — make you — feel —" She went out on the balcony round which True had

trained the roses, and leaned her arms on the rail. From the stoep beneath came the sound of her brother's voice and Vibart's; they had reached the question of the increase of the coloured population, and the Professor was snarling. Vibart's tones were the more pleasant to listen to by contrast; he spoke with a full, soft note that rose and fell easily. Margery listened to the sound with enjoyment, she could not distinguish the words, but he appeared to have left the political view, and to be telling a story, for the Professor laughed. Many older women than Margery Cunningham had experienced the charm of Vibart's voice and manner, — he was clever socially, — but it was fortunate that the drift of his present conversation passed Margery's ears, unhearing. When with men he was very excellent company.

The Professor came to the dinner-table in a good temper. The whisky he had drunk had not yet affected his liver, and had raised his spirits. He remarked that Vibart was a nice fellow and a gentleman, and Margery's heart warmed to her brother for his discrimination.

"At least he does not listen to gossip, or allow it to prejudice him. He must have heard plenty of stories about Major Vibart, yet he openly says he is glad to see him. Of course if he thought him a really questionable character, he would not have him here, as I am in the house, — and he seemed to quite like my talking to him," she thought in all innocence. The Professor was in truth somewhat pleased that his sister had appeared able to entertain Major Vibart in his absence, and that gentleman's attitude towards her had raised her in her brother's estimation. The Professor was sublimely indifferent to people's reputations, quite superior to such grovelling details, in fact, so long as no disagreeable consequences accrued to him from their acquaintance. If the Major had been a shady character as

regarded debt, or gambling, or drink, and had not worn such well-cut coats and been welcome in the uppermost seats of the Wynbergian synagogue, Anthony Cunningham would have shunned him like the plague, and would have said that he could not afford to be seen with such people, — it was damaging to his own position. But Vibart did not want to borrow money of him, and his name of "the Tracker" threatened nothing to the Professor individually. He did not look further.

"By the way, Madge," he said during dinner. "I have seen that pony that Drysdale recommended. I think it will do all right, but I shall try it myself first. It is as well to have one that is up to my weight, in case I want it at any time. Vibart wants you to ride one of his for a day or so."

"Oh, yes, he mentioned something about it," Madge said, as carelessly as she could. Her heart beat high, and she waited breathlessly for what should come.

"Of course if he likes to lend it to you, you can accept. It is really very good of him, considering that you are a beginner. For God's sake don't let it down!"

"I don't see why I should let Major Vibart's pony down any more than Mr. Dodd's. I have ridden his from the first time I went out, and I am surely more to be trusted now than then."

She did not ask whether the Major had also offered himself as an escort, but left the arranging of the situation to Fate. She went a step further however when she wrote to Starling, next day, to say she did not think she could come for her usual ride.

"I sha'n't say that I am going with Major Vibart," she argued, "because I don't know that I am. He did n't say he would bring the pony to-day, or send it. Ten chances to one he won't. In that case, I shall be the only one to suffer, because I shall miss my ride. But I will just leave it and see. Anthony does n't like my always using Mr. Dodd's ponies, so a day off is a good thing."

It was a brilliant day. The air seemed to twinkle with its own radiance and heat, and the bright-coloured country round Vine Lodge seemed more untouched with the sadness of the world than ever. Margery spent the morning on the stoep working; it chanced that no visitors dropped in on her, and she had the sunshine and the warm sweet-smelling garden to herself. The bugles called across the distance, and a detachment of infantry swung down the road, route-marching, with the band playing "Tommy Atkins," and once a solitary horseman came down from Camp, along the narrow white way between the little red cottages and the vineyards; but he turned to the left, instead of coming up the lane to Vine Lodge. Margery took up her work again that had fallen in her lap, and went on sewing.

The Professor had gone to Cape Town. Margery lunched alone, in the shaded dining-room with the sunlight trying to creep between the lowered venetian blinds; she was somewhat sobered from her secret anticipations of the morning, and ate her grapes pensively. There were always grapes at every meal through the season, cold, bloomy, and luscious, and the white wine of Constantia which is made from them and is like Muscatel. After luncheon she put on her "cappie," which is a big pink or white sun-bonnet, and went into the sun-warmed garden. In Madge's case the bonnet was pink, with a flapping border, and her face peeped out between the frills, which made an ideal frame for her young beauty, — warm lips, round cheeks, dewy eyes, and hair like cobwebs with the sunshine tangled in it. She made a tour through all her domain, from the little plantation of fir-trees behind the house, — how odorous they smelt, and how strong of pine in the noontide heat! — down through the kitchen garden, the ripening mealies, and the peach-trees, even to the vineyard. As she saun-



tered up the steps to the higher level of the drive again, between the oleander bushes, her heart gave a sudden throb, and she stood still with a curious realisation of Fate. Two horses stood before the door, and a figure in riding-dress was apparently having an altercation with the Kaffir girl, who nodded and grinned with double vehemence as Madge appeared.

"Oh, Major Vibart, did you mean to ride now? Won't it be too hot?" she said, coming forward, and looking up from the pink shadows of the cappie.

It was not often that he was taken at a disadvantage, but for a second he only looked and did not speak.

"I thought I would just come in and see how you felt about it," he said, and there was some sort of effort in his voice. "Do you think it will be too hot? It is past three — by the time you have got on your habit, and we start, it will be nearly four."

"Oh, I don't mind the heat. If you are willing, I will change as quickly as possible, and we will go at once. I am quite ready. Which is my pony? This? What a dear!"

"He is a capital lady's horse." They stood side by side to examine the animals, — a few minutes more of the sun-bonnet, before Madge changed into more conventional attire. Women are fond of blaming the Devil for their misfortunes, but after all they are his best ministers. He can generally be quite sure that they will do their best to help him.

Margery did not take long to change into her habit; an unacknowledged fear that the Professor would come home before she started made her quicker than usual. Of course he might raise no objection to her riding with Vibart, or he might join the party himself. Margery honestly owned to herself that the excursion would considerably lose its attractions if he did. She had no absolute assurance that he did not mean her to ride with Vibart alone — she would do so anyhow this once,

and "just see." Again the influence of the past few weeks.

"Now if I do anything wrong, you must be sure and tell me of it," she said as she settled herself in the saddle. "Please, don't be polite and only think things."

"I will put a leading rein on your pony if you like. Is that stirrup short enough?"

"Yes — no! I think I should like it a hole higher."

She could not help smiling down upon him as he stood with the bridle of his own horse slung over his shoulder, and his handsome face bent over her foot. He was extremely bronzed from his fortnight's shooting Up Country, and Madge thrilled a little with pleasure as she covertly noted the strength of his shorn square chin and the breadth of his chest and shoulders. He was a tall man, well-developed and well-trained, thanks to his profession. People who go to cattle-shows, and are judges of such things, observe and admire the same class of advantages in the entries there. Vibart was standing so close to her that Margery could detect a faint scent of cigar smoke about him, — ever a pleasant scent in the open air, but always with a masculine suggestion about it to a woman. It was almost a relief when he swung himself into his own saddle and they rode away, up the lane, and out of the open gate into the sunny red road.

"Now, where shall we go? To the Flats?" she said.

"Have you been out to Bishop's Court yet?"

"No, I don't think so. We have generally gone to the Lady's Mile, or out by Kenilworth."

"This way then. Don't hold your rein so tightly, please — your pony will go better if you loosen it."

"I am so afraid, with a strange pony, that he will stumble!"

"Oh, he is quite sure-footed, and besides you could pull him up with the rein like that. You can hold a

horse perfectly without letting him know it until the moment comes — or a man either."

"My experience of the latter animal is limited."

"Is it? I should not have thought so."

"Perhaps you could give me hints in that art too?"

"What art?"

"The management of man."

"Miss Cunningham, will you forgive me if I say you are a little hypocrite?"

"No, I don't think I should — so don't say it."

"I shall think it anyhow. Do you really want to know how to manage men?"

"It would be interesting to hear a masculine opinion."

"Will you give me a feminine opinion if I state mine?"

"I won't promise — but I think I will. Well?"

"Go on as you have begun."

The horses were walking side by side up the soft red road in the direction of the mountains, which rose before them distinct, yet without a hard outline, and warm with purple shadows and golden lights. Blue was everywhere, — in the pure vaulted sky over the alternate oaks and firs which lined the roads, in the flowerful plumbago hedges crowned with quivering colour and delicate breath, and in Margery's eyes between the curve of the lashes. The motion of the horses was enough to send the blood flying through her young veins without the excitement of keeping mental pace with the subtle influence of Vibart's tone. He said more than the mere words he spoke.

"I thought you were going to advise me to learn to cook," she said, with a laugh born of her racing blood. "I think that is the feminine ideal of managing men."

"I should never trouble to tell you to look after a man's physical wants."

“Why not?”

“Because you are much too clever to neglect such an obvious advantage.” Margery was young enough to like being called clever. “Miss Cunningham, I wonder if you would think it very strange if I confided in you.”

Margery was young enough to feel flattered by a confidence from such a man. She had realised that he was a person of importance in her present world, and he had a vaguely fascinating reputation; furthermore, he managed her perfectly.

“I should be very flattered,” she said, for she was an honest little girl.

“You know Beau Livingston, don’t you?”

“Yes —”

“He is a friend of mine. He met me this morning, and in the course of conversation he said, in his light way, that Miss Dodd had been trying to poison your mind against me. Now, please, don’t think that I believe that literally—I know Livingston was only joking, but I know too that he had some foundation for the remark. Is n’t that so?”

The flush on Margery’s face answered him.

“Whatever Miss Dodd said,”—Vibart spoke in a lower voice, and looking straight between his horse’s ears,—“I don’t think she would be uncharitable. But in any case, I don’t want you to be prejudiced against me. You won’t let yourself be so, will you?”

“No, of course not. But indeed I don’t listen to gossip, Major Vibart. You must n’t think —”

“I don’t think anything. Only I am very anxious that you should be friends with me—will you? You don’t know how much a man in my position values a girl’s friendship!”

It was as old as the hills,—a paraphrase of the eternal. “I am a bad man, and you, as a good woman, can influence me. Undertake my conver-



sion," — with the added reference to his unusual misfortune skilfully thrown in. Madge was quick to feel; her eyes grew rather misty, and she impulsively reached out her hand to him.

"Indeed I will! And I don't mind what anybody says. They are sure to gossip in a place like this."

He took the kind little hand, and turning back the riding gauntlet kissed the soft wrist. It was very chivalrous, Madge thought, and even if an element of flirtation should enter into their compact of friendship, it could not possibly matter now that they understood each other. "Poor man, I daresay he is glad enough to distract himself!" she thought ingenuously. "And it won't hurt me!" Twenty is an age when we are serenely certain of being bullet-proof.

"Shall we try a canter?" Vibart said in a lighter tone, and, Madge assenting, they rode joyously forward between the sunlit earth and the blue sky, with no trace in their faces of tragedy in the past or thought for the morrow. It was a splendid ride, Madge always thought afterwards; she did not know that she would ever enjoy another more. Vibart was a delightful companion, tactful, amusing, ready to laugh or to fence with "verbal point and parry," with the facility of twenty years' practice behind him, and the whetted appetite of the present to make him exert himself.

"I hope we shall have many rides together," he said, as they turned homewards again.

"I hope we shall," Madge assented gaily.

"May I come to-morrow? It is a pity to lose the fine weather at the end of the summer!"

"I shall be very pleased," said Madge, wondering how she was to explain to Starling. "What a pity summer does n't last all the year round, even here!"

"Winter is not so serious a season as in England, you know. It is cold and rainy, but one gets beautiful warm days, and sunshine nearly always."

"I am glad of that. Don't you love the sunshine?"

"What a lot of love you do waste on inanimate Nature! You loved that old house of the Bishop's just now, and now it is the sunshine!"

"I always think Nature is so well worth loving. She gives you measure for measure."

"Not more than human beings, surely?"

"I don't know. There is always 'l'un qui baise,' you know."

"Is there? I do not know, but am open to learn."

"Now you are talking nonsense."

"Excuse me, we were talking about measure for measure, and 'le baiser.'"

She laughed in spite of herself. "Well, can you honestly say you have ever given measure for measure?"

"In what commodity?"

"I *could* only mean one!"

"Why not? Have you never tried —"

"Of course I have n't!"

"What?"

She gave a vexed laugh at finding herself in a corner. "I mean — well, what did you mean?" she said.

"What I mean is that if you like to offer me either, I will give measure for measure — 'pressed down, and running over.'"

But without answering, she put her pony into a canter and rode on through the sun and the shadow, with the wind cooling the surprised flush on her face. "He should n't — oh, he should n't *really*," she thought between her irrepressible laughter and the intoxication of her own high spirits. "But he got me nicely into a corner, and how cool of him to turn it round like that!"

Not until they had nearly reached Vine Lodge again did Vibart refer to their compact.

"I wish you would give me a piece of plumbago to

remind me of this ride of ours," he said. "Won't you? Because we are going to be such friends."

Margery leaned from her saddle and pulled a spray of the ephemeral blue flowers.

"How pretty they are!" she said, "and how soon they fade. They look nothing by gaslight either—they are just made for the sunshine and the day. There—" some instinct of coquetry had made her divide the flowers and tuck half of them into her breast. "There is your reminder. I suppose you will find it withered to-morrow morning, and throw it away, wondering why you kept it. And then what becomes of the remembrance?"

"You can be very cruel, Miss Margery. But I shall leave facts to contradict you."

As he took the flower, his eyes met hers, and she drew back. Only for an instant—then she had lost the impression again, and they rode home gaily. She kept her little feeling of triumphant amusement all the evening, and the smile in her eyes and the song on her lips partook of it.

"Si vous n'avez rien à me dire,  
Pourquoi venir auprès de moi?"

"I wish you would get out of that disgusting habit of humming, Madge," said the Professor. Yesterday's whisky was revenging itself upon him.

"I'll go into the garden—then you won't hear me," said Margery, somewhat flippantly.

"Pourquoi me faire ce sourire,  
Qui tournerait la tête d'un roi!"

"Would it, I wonder? 'Qui tournerait la tête d'une reine'—I daresay!"

"Si vous n'avez rien à m' apprendre  
Pourquoi me pressez vous la main?—  
Sur le rêve angélique et tendre  
Auquel vous songez en chemin!"

"I wonder if he knew that he had slipped from Miss Cunningham into Miss Margery in one single afternoon? I must really be careful, or we might lose the 'Miss' altogether. Should I mind much? I wonder — no, I won't wonder. I will just enjoy."



## CHAPTER IV

*"Doubt not the heavy Snake was white  
Who tempted Eve from Paradise !"*

JOHNNIE DODD had come down from Johannesburg two years since and settled at Friedenhof because it was the most expensive house he could find. He was a simple soul, and believed in the touchstone of price. "If a thing is good, you must pay for it," he argued, and delightedly put down his ten thousand pounds as a beginning of operations. Friedenhof was an old Dutch house, large and roomy; but Johnnie's views were larger. He began to expend some of the enterprise which had stood him in good stead "Between the Chains" in adding embellishments to his house, until the original structure began to have the scandalised air of an old lady tricked out in juvenile garments. When Beau Livingston first drifted into Wynberg society, and stayed there awhile to laugh at it, he found Johnnie Dodd adding a large billiard-room to his west wing with immense energy, and stated his opinion with beautiful directness.

"Johnnie, you are a Goth !"

"Don't care if I am !" said Johnnie, airily, in the high windy voice which surprised strangers from his large solid person. "I go in for comfort and convenience." And he went on building.

"Johnnie," said Beau, serenely, "you are a fool !"

Johnnie Dodd stopped building, and considered the proposition. It touched the question of price, for if he were a fool, he might be damaging the market value of his property.

"You have got a singularly curious and interesting

Dutch house," said Livingston. "Something of a unique specimen, with a value that money cannot produce, though it can buy it once made. You are busy now adding anachronisms in the way of glass houses and hot water pipes, and are depreciating your own property."

"Just what I began to fear!" said Johnnie, rubbing his hair up on end. "But I want to play billiards and to have my hot bath."

"Then play billiards and bathe, but do not build brand-new rooms to do these things in. The house is far too large for you and your wife now, and even when your daughter comes home from school she cannot occupy more than a suite of rooms. Use that which you have, and alter to suit your convenience; but with due respect to the Dutchmen, who knew far better how to build for the climate than you do."

So Johnnie stayed his hand, and devoted his inventive mind to adapting modern luxuries to old stability, in such a cunning fashion that it should not jar on antiquarians. He introduced a marble bath and electric light, and he kept his glass houses out in the grounds that they should not stare in on his cool, vast drawing-rooms under the impertinent guise of conservatories. A year later, Starling came home from school in Switzerland, and Johnnie had again to be restrained from breaking out in a new direction.

"I must have a room where the little girl can dance," he expostulated with Beau. "And what's the good of all those tiles?"

"Very well, then have a parquet floor that you can put down over the tiles which are the original flooring of such houses as Friedenhof, and which it is sacrilege to dig up. You'll have to pay for it, and that will please you," said Livingston.

The Millionaire put his hand into his pocket, and was content.

Starling's own rooms made another outlet for her father's expenditure. She was the only child, and adored by both parents, from whom she fortunately inherited enough good sense and simplicity of character to prevent her being unbearably spoilt. She was a little person who liked knick-knacks, and the objects of "bigotry and virtue" in her "den" would have furnished a museum.

True was always making or arranging or putting up something for Starling, a process which involved his being in and out of Friedenhof so perpetually that no one minded him any more than the household cat, and Mr. Johnnie hardly troubled to treat him as a visitor when he met him on his own doorstep.

"Hulloa, my boy!" he would say, patting the little Captain on the back with a huge hand. "Have I seen you before to-day? I really forget. Are you going in to see the womenkind?"

"Is Mrs. Johnnie in, sir?" True would smile.

"If she is n't, Starling is," Mr. Johnnie would reply. "Come and have a game of billiards with me when you're tired of petticoats. I'm just going through the grounds to see that those lazy niggers are keeping things up as I told them!"

Whereupon True would conduct himself into the hospitably open house and through the corridors to Starling's domains, where he gave a peculiar double knock of which no one else knew the secret. True and Starling had a code of signals, which was no doubt a great convenience to them. They had known each other just about a year when Margery Cunningham came to Wynberg, which was equal to a seven years' acquaintance at Home. A shifting population forces an intimacy of years to be condensed into a few months. Under these circumstances the hothouse intimacies of the Colony are understandable, and a whole life's experience in England may be condensed into a year or so

True appeared at Friedenhof in his usual fashion one afternoon that summer, and finding the hall door open, and no one about, he walked in without ringing the bell. It was only about a week since he had nailed up Madge's roses, and spoken to Mrs. Drysdale about her. Now he had his reasons for wishing to speak to Starling. He did not meet Mr. Johnnie as he half expected, so he went straight to Starling's domains, and knocked at the outer door. Starling was at home in her nest, and said, "Come in, True."

"What is the Lady doing?" said True, as he came in smiling. All the sunshine of the outer world seemed to be shining darkly in his eyes, and he looked particularly radiant as he sat down beside the writing-table where Starling was dimly discernible amongst a forest of papers.

"Writing invitations. Mother is giving a moonlight picnic next week. Take a pen and address the envelopes, True."

True moved his chair closer to the scribe, and establishing himself as near as circumstances would permit, he set to work.

"Dear Mr. Forrester," he read, sotto voce. "Shall I address Pete's to Camp, or to the Cottage, Lady?"

"The Cottage. And there's Edith Hofman's — better do the pair together."

True smiled under his moustache, and wrote the envelopes.

"Next, please, — 'Beaumont Livingston' — what is that you are tearing up?"

"Oh, nothing — only yours. I didn't know you would come to-day, so I just wrote it to be on the safe side."

"I don't count," said True, sweetly. "But let me have my invitation, please! I sha'n't come if you don't."

"Well you may as well have it, for the date and the



meeting place. Go on, True — how lazy you are! Polly Harbord and Mr. Tullock. We are going to put him up, he can't get back to Simon's Town the same night, — and the Cunninghams, and the Drysdales. There, be quick !”

“Does Miss Cunningham cycle?” asked True, very busy with the addresses.

“Yes, but not well enough to ride a long distance, and besides she has n't a machine. I expect they will ride.”

“She has been riding with you lately, has n't she?”

“Not now,” said Starling, dryly. “She has found some one else to ride with, I think.”

True bit the penholder thoughtfully, and looked at the pile of letters. “Are n't you going to ride together any more?” he said.

Starling could not be said to be bad-tempered, but she was occasionally testy. “That depends a good deal on our mutual convenience, I should think,” she said. When she was annoyed, the little lisp in her voice became intensified.

True dipped the pen in the ink. “It might be kind to ride with her — as she is a stranger in a strange land,” he said tentatively.

“Perhaps you would like to offer yourself as escort. If you don't some one else will !” said Starling, tossing over a loose sheet. “There's another envelope to address — Major Vibart's.”

“The Tracker does n't cycle !” said True, with a sigh.

“Look here,” said Starling, with a sudden effort, “I can ask Mrs. Cromo Dame.”

True's eyes met hers and flashed something undecipherable. The code of signals was not confined to sounds or movements. “Your mother does not like her,” he remarked.

“Neither do I — but Major Vibart does.”

“She looks very well in her riding habit,” said True.

"She is a work of art in any costume," said Starling. "The only 'bon mot' of Mr. Forrester's that I ever treasured was when he said he could not at first remember her double name, but he always called her Mrs. Hand-painted Lady in his own mind."

"It was rather a neat paraphrase," True acknowledged. "I don't think she is a bad sort, you know. She was very kind when the Drysdale kids had the hooping-cough. She was always sending fruit down to them."

"The crumbs from the rich man's table," said Starling, with a sniff. "I hope the Drysdales like charity. However, I will ask her, and she will come. She looks particularly well by moonlight; the moon is generous, and almost as kind to *passée* women as pink-shaded lamps."

"Then I shall cycle," was all True said, irrelevantly.

Starling cycled; but she knew that True had hovered on the brink of sacrificing himself in his usual fashion, and riding, in order to act as bodyguard to Madge, and the relief in his voice rang sweetly in her ears.

Mrs. Johnnie Dodd had fixed her picnic for the night of the full moon, — probably the last moon of the summer weather. She palpitated with anxiety all that day, for a South-Easter had arisen, and the world was an evil combination of discomfort and red dust. "If it blows like this it will be perfectly impossible to cycle," she said to Starling twenty times at least, and bemoaned her fate that such a wind should have cursed her in March. "I really thought I could calculate that the last of them had gone down with the February drought," she said. "Why, we have even had a little rain,— enough to make the roads good, and almost autumn weather up till now."

"Never mind," returned Starling, dimpling over a pyramid of sandwiches. "If we can't cycle, we will ride or drive. No one will care, so long as you let them

eat their supper on the grass and play at chuck-half-penny afterwards ! ”

Poor Mrs. Johnnie sighed, and ordered marzipan and venison patties despondently. With the sunset, however, the wind fell, and her spirits rose. Mrs. Johnnie's own face was something like the full moon, and when the clouds did not obscure it, it beamed with a mild and radiant light. The hampers were packed into the Cape carts, and Mrs. Johnnie took her place alongside, as the clock pointed to ten minutes to eight. Mr. Johnnie and Starling had gone on before, a large black blot and a small black blot upon the moonlight, skimming on invisible wheels a foot or so above the sleepy red earth. Mr. Johnnie's machine had been built for him ; it was necessary to mount his seventeen stone on a weight-carrier, but he rode up and down hill valiantly, with the dim hope of some day acquiring a lighter machine.

The party assembled at the entrance of Main's Avenue from the high road, blocking the traffic and drawing a native audience to stand and stare ; truly it was an awe-inspiring calvacade : a dozen cycles, six saddle horses, two Cape carts, six hampers, and Mrs. Johnnie. When the Cunninghams arrived on the scene, all the party had assembled save three, the Drysdales and Beaumont Livingston, and as soon as these lag-gards appeared, it started.

“ You had better let me go in front with the provisions,” said Mrs. Johnnie from the cart. “ That will give me time to see that the farm people set the tables properly. Why, Mrs. Drysdale, I thought you were going to cycle ! ”

“ I never ride a dead horse when I can have a live one,” Clarice Drysdale's voice rang cheerily in the black shadow of the firs. The bugles announcing reinforcements to the rescue would never sound sweeter in Truman's ears than did her well-known tones. If ever his big eyes expressed anything, they expressed grati-

tude then. She also had thought beforehand of the probable disposition of the party. "You are of one mind with me, I see, Madge. Ah, Professor, so you really have been tempted from your beetles? Are you going to ride with me? How d'ye do, Mrs. Cromo Dame, saw you in the village this morning, but you didn't see me."

"Really? Where was that?"

Mrs. Drysdale did not answer; she was chatting gaily with the Professor, who looked anything but the accepted type of a man of science. His horse and himself were irreproachable, and he was pleasantly conscious of being the best dressed man present, except perhaps Major Vibart. This knowledge made him passingly gracious, even to his sister, whom he advised to look out for mole-holes when they came to the Flats, and then handed her over to Oswald Drysdale's companionship. Madge had turned to look at the woman to whom Mrs. Drysdale had spoken. She had never met Mrs. Cromo Dame before, and her glance was inclusive. The lady represented, in profile, a suggested double chin and a developed bust. As the cavalcade strung itself out across the tram-lines and down towards Kenilworth, she passed Madge, laughing and talking with Vibart, and displayed herself as a woman with rippled red hair and a too white skin, — a woman of velvet flesh and art colouring, impossible to believe in, but not impossible to admire, as one admires the painted flowers on a deep pile carpet.

"She is well over thirty, and I have seen many duplicates of her in town," thought Madge. "In the Park, in Regent Street, shopping in Piccadilly, always fat, and made up, and — yes — lovely to look at if one doesn't go too close. Does he admire that sort of thing, I wonder? I suppose that is why they call him fast, because he talks to her, and she paints, — and I daresay she is clever. I don't see why he should n't



talk to her if he likes. She is probably far more entertaining to a man of the world than any one else here. Oh, dear, and I thought I was going to enjoy to-night so much, and now I am afraid I am not ! ”

“ I wonder what she is thinking about to make her so silent ? ” cogitated Drysdale. “ Shall we ride on a little faster, Miss Cunningham ? ” he said. “ We shall get a nice smooth bit for a canter in a minute. ”

“ Oh ! ” said Margery, rousing herself. “ Yes, let us. ”

There is nothing so awake as an African night. All day the earth drowns in the sunshine ; but when the light dies, she wakes up, and whispers to herself all through the darkness. As the hoofs flew over the soft, sandy roads, the wind made little noises in the branches of the trees, which muttered together, “ We know, we know, ” in answer ; and when the party broke out into the wide, waving grass-lands, the sound of their going could hardly overpower, even to themselves, the thrill of life innumerable on the Flats. At the end of half a mile, Madge drew rein ; the rest of the party were somewhat scattered, near and far, about the interminable silver sweep of the grasses, intersected by the level roads on which the cyclists looked like flies in the distance.

“ Let us walk a little now, ” she said. “ I want to look about me ; it is all so beautiful. ”

“ Yes, I always think the night is the best time to see the country. In the day one wants to sit under one’s own vine and fig-tree and bask. Hear the crickets ? ”

The air was full of their busy voices, like the whirr of a vast fairy machinery. Every now and then something would rustle, whether overhead or underfoot Madge could not tell, but the whole empty night, the straight, level grass of the Flats, only swelling a little up and down in black and silver heights and hollows to the mountain range, and the solitude of the infinite

sky, seemed thrilling with their own spirit and mystery. They rode in comparative silence, with disjointed conversation now and then to mark their sociability, until a lonely belt of dark trees became visible in a curve of hollow ground to their right, and, "That is the farm!" Drysdale said.

The bustle and life, and the laughing and talking under the trees seemed an incongruous contrast to the silent silver night beyond, when Madge rode into the party again. Two long tables were set up in the plantation behind the farm, with wooden forms to seat the guests after the manner of a school-feast. The moon shone broadly down upon the white cloth and the Dodds' glass and silver, while the generous load of provisions would have victualled a small army.

"I shall steal the supper soon, if we don't sit down," remarked Livingston, genially. "Mrs. Johnnie, I think you would like me to carve. Miss Cunningham, *you* would like to sit beside me, I know. Are we all here? What are we waiting for, you and I?"

"All except Vibart and Mrs. Cromo Dame," said Forrester. "Shall we wait for them, Mrs. Johnnie? Or —" he lowered his voice and spoke to Livingston — "shall we do as her husband is reported to have done at the marriage ceremony, and begin without her? They say it was hardly legal."

"Well," returned Livingston, in the same tone, "if she were not worth waiting for then, she certainly is not now. Jack will have to take care of her, and she will have to take care of herself." He turned to Margery suddenly, "The moon has not stolen your appetite, has it, Miss Cunningham?"

"Is the moon a universal thief?" said Margery, gaily, as she took her place. At least she would not notice the absentees, she thought; when they did arrive, she would be fathoms deep in her supper and Livingston's conversation.

"She has not stolen the colour of your eyes, at any rate," he said, with the assumed courtesy of an old man towards a child. "Now what shall I have for supper? What do you think would amuse me?"

"I am too concerned with my own to think of yours as yet. Is that caviare? I love caviare!"

"Dissipated little girl, what a vitiated taste! Suppose I begin with caviare too? It gives one an appetite, I have heard. What will you drink? Champagne, of course. Pass the champagne, Pete. There is quite a slump in fizz down this end of the table."

"Are you going to have some too, Mr. Livingston? I wish you would n't eat and drink exactly what I do. You have followed me throughout, and it begins to make me quite nervous."

"I am a little doubtful of Johnnie's food, and I would rather you were poisoned than I, if some one must go. Besides which it entertains me to see what you eat, and to risk it for once. Everything you have chosen as yet has been entirely unfortunate."

"You seem to be as easily entertained, as the man who used to take off his wife's wedding-ring whenever he wanted a little excitement. He must have had such a very simple mind."

"Or an admirable memory — I should say imagination. But what a very naughty little speech for *you* to make! Have some more champagne — I feel that you ought n't to be encouraged. Ah, here are the truants. My dear Vibart, we have finished most of the pink food, which is always the best (have you ever noticed that in a menu, Miss Cunningham?), but there is still some white and brown left."

"We lost our way — we did really," Vibart said, joining good-humouredly in the laughter and chaff which greeted him. Mrs. Cromo Dame did not laugh. Her sharply-defined red lips smiled a little, and she shot a glance down the table as she sat down and

said, "Turkey, please!" to Mr. Johnnie's solicitous appeal.

"What a disreputable-looking woman she would be if she were not so smart in her clothes!" Polly Harbord remarked quietly to Starling. Polly's keen, sleepy eyes had taken in every line of Mrs. Cromo Dame as she sat down, and were still fixed musingly upon her, "She bears the stamp of her type too plainly upon her."

"Yes," said Starling, briefly. It was one of her peculiarities that she rarely discussed people she did not like, not entirely from charity, but partly because she did not care to let her thoughts dwell upon them at all.

"Did you hear the last story about her?"

"No. Take care! Captain Truman will catch what you say!"

"No, he won't, he is too busy lighting his cigarette. You know Cromo Dame went shooting a week ago, and was not to return until Monday morning. Well, he turned up unexpectedly on the Sunday night, and his wife had got a supper-party consisting of one. As it happened Cromo Dame met the supper-party on the doorstep, just going in, and the Tracker said —"

"Oh!"

"Well, you must have known who it was! He *is* clever; he had just three seconds to collect himself. He said, 'My dear fellow, I saw your cart at the station, and I guessed you had come back. I just came round to see how you had fared. Did you have good sport?' Cromo Dame, who is either very deep or very unsuspicious, asked him to supper. So the preparations were not entirely wasted after all. But don't you think the Tracker deserves to get on?"

"I hope he will never get what he deserves. At least I have that much charity. But, Polly, how do you know these things?"



"Oh, Blanche Cromo Dame absolutely told me herself. You know she is very outspoken. How smart the Professor looks! He is an unusual sort of man. I was so surprised to see him here to-night."

"We had several surprises. How complicated everything seems just now! I am constantly expecting something to happen. Only the safeguard of our life out here is that none of us stay long enough for things to reach a crisis."

"It is the wives and husbands who are complicated," said Polly, with a little laugh, as she rose from the supper-table. "Mr. Forrester says he finds it almost as difficult to sort them properly now as they seem to find it themselves. Are we going to play games? Do let's have Blindman's Buff, or Hunt the Slipper, or something really silly, Starling! I like to laugh one day in seven, and Mrs. Wrighton has sighed and groaned all this afternoon."

"Poor Polly! I am afraid Blindman's Buff won't do, though. Edith Hofman fell down last time and twisted her ankle by tripping over the root of a tree. We can play Tags, if you like."

Tags was a new game to Margery, as was also the spectacle of twenty grown-up people rushing to and fro with far more zest than a party of children, waking the quiet night with their voices and laughter, and charging into each other's arms to avoid being caught by the pursuer as they were chased from one tag to another. A tag, she discovered, consisted of two people, a girl standing in front of a man who generally placed his hands on her waist to steady her. She found herself in this position, one of eight couples, with Clive Forrester behind her; Oswald Drysdale was the pursuer, or "Devil," and Polly Harbord, "Odd Man Out." It was Polly's business in starting the game, to try and reach one of the tags, which were stationed at equal distances from her and from each

other, before she was caught herself. If she could do this, and station herself in front of the girl, the man behind became "Odd Man Out," and had to run for it in his turn. And so on and so forth, with more noise and scuffling than at the ordinary school-feast. More licence, too, for dignity vanished in the heat of the game, and men forgot their manners if not their preferences. Mrs. Johnnie did not play, but all the other women did, in spite of riding-habits or other drawbacks. It was nothing to Madge to rush across a moonlit space of grass about twelve feet wide, for she was young and light and active, and even her habit could not impede her. She was difficult to catch, and knew that she showed to advantage over Mrs. Cromo Dame, who, with panting breast and hysterical laughter, hurled herself into the men's arms, for she generally seemed to chance upon those tags which had been shifted so that it was not a girl who stood in front. It was a relief to Madge to remember, when the fun was at its loudest, that her brother had gone off to smoke with Mr. Johnnie and talk "trade," before the game began. She would have been afraid to run, and call out warnings to others in danger, if Anthony had been standing by, in sneering contemplation of antics about which, as she well knew, he would express an unmodified opinion next day. As it was she laughed, and ran, and made as much noise as any of them, when the cry came, "Miss Cunningham, you're out — run!" and she saw the "Devil" dodging on the other side of the tag. It was in a headlong rush from behind Beaumont Livingston and Polly Harbord that the pursuer doubled and met her before she could reach another tag. Madge gave a shriek of excitement, and turning fell into the first pair of arms she saw.

"Take care, Lady!" said True, catching her deftly, and holding her as daintily as if she had been a butterfly, even while he smiled into her eyes. "Miss Hofman, you are out."

Edith Hofman fled from behind him, and Madge stood still, panting.

"Oh, True, this is a dreadful game!" she said laughing. "I am so glad it was you."

"I am glad too. I don't count. Stand steady, there is going to be a rush, and two people think they are 'Odd Man Out.'"

This indeed had happened, and the next three minutes were lively with the shrieking, flying figures of pursued and pursuer. Madge stood her ground, knowing that she was within the rules, but during the scrimmage she was conscious that True had been swept away, and a woman—Polly Harbord, she thought—had taken his place behind her, which was of course all wrong. Then Polly was shifted, and a man's hands seized her waist again with a stronger grip than True's.

"Stand still, — you are quite safe," said Vibart's voice in her ear. It had the intoxicated sound of laughter and high spirits and excitement, and Madge shrank from it, frightened, and from his warm breath on her neck.

"Major Vibart, is it you?" she tried to say. "Don't" — it was impossible to free herself of the hands pressing her waist — "Don't you think we have played enough? Every one is getting tired. I think I shall stand out."

"They will stop in a minute — there's going to be a rush. Forrester, that's not fair," he shouted over Madge's head, startling her afresh with the loud tones. She had a horrible feeling that he had lost his head, and anything might happen, and a resentful remembrance of his devotion to Mrs. Cromo Dame up till now. She had meant to be dignified and indifferent if she did come in contact with him, but the coming in contact had not been quite so physical in her imagination, and it is difficult to be dignified over one's shoulder to some one very much taller who must bend

down to hear. There came a rush of the younger men, who were romping together like young puppies, and were equally out of control, and Vibart hastily put his arms round the girl in front of him to protect her. It was really necessary, for the horseplay threatened to become too rough for safety, and one of the players came rather heavily to the ground. Then the game was over, and Margery extricated herself with a new feeling of distaste.

"How detestable!" she said to herself, as she and Starling smoothed each other's ruffled plumes. "And the worst of it was, I had to accept it and say nothing. I wonder if any one saw, and what they thought? Well, I really could n't help it, and to do him justice I don't think he could either. If only it had been True! I won't ride home with him whatever happens. I don't suppose he wants to, but anyhow I'm not going to be treated like that — neglected all the evening, and then suddenly taken liberties with because the man gets excited over a game. Thank goodness, I have arranged to spend to-morrow with Mrs. Drysdale, and I sha'n't have to see him, even though he should chance to call."

"We can't have another game, it is getting too late," Starling said, as she tucked in a little wisp of Madge's hair. "The hampers are being packed up now. Isn't it a nuisance, True's cycle has punctured, and he can't ride home! He will have to drive in one of the carts I suppose."

Madge moved away, wondering if it would not be safer for her to drive too, and if she could pretend that her pony had fallen lame to effect that end. She was horribly afraid of Vibart's society.

As she mounted, and walked her pony slowly out of the farm enclosure, Mrs. Johnnie and the carts passed her. To Madge's dismay she saw that Drysdale was driving, and he turned and called something to her of which all she caught was, "Sorry to desert you — another escort."



"Then we are uneven numbers," thought Madge, — she had forgotten all about Truman and his punctured bicycle, — "and I must either ride with Anthony and Mrs. Drysdale, which he won't like, or go with the cyclists. Of course the other couple who are on horseback are out of the question."

As she quickened her pace, Starling passed her, riding with Livingston. Madge did not stop to consider that here was another change of escort; she put her horse into a trot, with some idea of catching them up and asking leave to join them. The sound of hoofs behind her only made her the more anxious; without turning to look who it was she changed from a trot to a canter and raced as hard as she dared, with her slight knowledge of riding, until the other horse overtook her in spite of her efforts to escape.

"What *are* you doing?" said True, breathlessly. "You are following the road, and that will take you ever so far round! I've been trying to catch you for five minutes."

"I was going to join Starling," said Margery, with intense relief. "I did not know you were riding. I went off by myself in a pet, you see, thinking I was deserted."

"You might have known I should n't desert you, Lady. Shall we have a canter? This is a nice level bit."

On the whole, Margery enjoyed the ride home even more than the ride out. It was a real relief to her to have True with her, and she possessed the happy faculty of putting a past disagreeable out of her mind to enjoy a present pleasure. Whether it would be the same with a great grief she had not yet had occasion to try; but the little pin-prick of Vibart's devotion to Mrs. Cromo Dame, and her revulsion of feeling with regard to him, were not sufficient to mar her enjoyment of the long canter over the moonlit grass, and True's congenial companionship. Margery liked True; he

was not brilliant in conversation, or subtle, as Vibart could be at times; his air of devotion was entirely on the surface, but really genuine where he placed his friendship. He never said unkind things, and he never offended a woman on the plea of being a man. That much she had discovered already. As she went to bed that night she summed up her evening's experiences with great candour in her own mind.

“Major Vibart is a flirt — I have been told so often, and it is quite true. He has been riding with me for a week or two now, and making me believe that — well, that he liked me very much, and would rather talk to me than to other people. To-night he has looked at and spoken to no one but that woman with the red hair and the figure — except once, and then I wish he had n't. It was horrid!” (At this point she plunged her face and arms into cold water, as if to wash away a remembrance.) “It is all my own silly fault that I felt humiliated, because my vanity led me into believing that he really meant the things he hinted. He was too clever to say them absolutely, I see that now. For the future, I won't think anything of what he says, I will only laugh. And I won't talk to him more than to other people, or look upon him as anything in particular. How lovely the mere riding in the moonlight was! I enjoyed it with my body, and brain, and soul. I shall never forget those great waving Flats; I felt somehow as if I were growing, — as if I had found something larger than my own life, and wanted to expand to it, — I wonder if any one else felt so too. It's rather lonely to have those feelings all to myself, with no one to sympathise and understand. What a nice little fellow True is, and how he does flirt with his eyes! He never makes me uneasy though, as some of the other men do, — Mr. Livingston, for instance. He is very amusing, and he makes me feel as if I were effervescing somehow. I seem all fizz and froth and talk-

ing nonsense very fast when I am with him. Nothing matters, because nothing is real." (Here she took down her hair, and buried her face in its soft thick folds.) "But sometimes he says something, quite lightly, that might mean a great deal, — terrible things that I am afraid to understand, and at which we both laugh as if we were talking nonsense still. I wonder — I think I will talk a good deal to Mr. Livingston. He makes me feel as if I had been exercising my brain, and were getting quite skilful at chattering." (Here a little white foot slipped out of a velvet slipper, and Madge stood, frilled and snowy, beside the bed for a moment, before she scrambled in.) "He is Jack Vibart's friend too — and they seem to think a great deal of each other. I believe I could attract Mr. Livingston as well as an older woman." (She got into bed, and cuddled down among the pillows.) "There, I'm only wanting to do it to make Major Vibart think more of me, and revenge myself on him. I have come right round to the point I started from, and that I meant to forget. I will go to sleep, and think no more about him, and not be silly."

## CHAPTER V

*"Where the apple reddens  
Never pry —  
Lest we lose our Edens,  
Eve and I."*

THEY boast at Newlands that they have the prettiest cricket ground in the British Empire. I like Dover as well, myself (I mean the old School ground, which is too small, for the ball is always going beyond the boundary, but that does not affect its picturesqueness); but I admit that the Newlands ground has the advantage of a unique setting. A blue line of mountains looks in on you over the fir-tree belt, and the prospect from the Stand — it is something larger than a view — gives you a chance to lose yourself in open air and incalculable distance. The Saturday matches are very much to the neighbourhood what the Corner is on Sunday to those who dwell within measurable distance of Hyde Park, and the string of carts and carriages behind the spectators is a settled institution.

Mrs. Drysdale generally called for Madge about three, and drove her down. "It is a pity not to go, for the season will soon be over," she said. "Ossy will turn up later, but I want to get down there in time for a good place, and to see something of the play. I am one of the few women who really watch the game. The majority don't do more than ask what the score is at intervals, and applaud in the wrong place."

She appeared on the Saturday following Mrs. Johnnie's picnic, and carried Madge off in triumph, despite the agreeable prophecies of the Professor, who came out onto the stoep to suggest sunstroke, mosquitoes, heat apoplexy, and their being the only people on the ground.



"Your brother, my dear," said Mrs. Drysdale, as they drove away, "is as wholesome as a tonic. He leaves a taste on my tongue like quinine, which I am sure is very good for us."

"I wish his conversation had the same effect when taken in large quantities, and made me deaf," remarked Madge, dryly. "He has discovered a new specimen of Scarabee, and it makes him particularly sociable. He kept awake to talk to me yesterday evening after dinner. When I had swallowed as much quinine as I thought good for me, I retired in good order and went to bed."

"He always puts me in mind of those charming people in the Bible who announced themselves as prophets whenever they wanted to say nasty things. My sympathies are entirely with the much-abused Kings; they had to sit still and listen whenever an old gentleman arrived with a parchment, and proceeded to insult them in the name of the Deity. I am sure the Deity would never have been so discourteous, but the Kings seem to have been easily persuaded, and hardly dared to murder one Prophet in ten."

"Poor things! and to annihilate people who cheerfully prognosticate evil seems such a natural outlet for one's feelings. Even proving them in the wrong is hardly a satisfactory substitute. I could have attended Anthony's funeral with a certain degree of pleasure on several occasions."

"We are about to prove him in the wrong anyway. The ground is crowded even now. I hope we shall get our usual place — I feel personally injured if any one else is third from the end of the carriage line. All right, Keeper, I have the passes. Now, Bob, don't shy at the band! Leaf, you had better go to his head."

The black boy dropped out of the back of the cart, and led Bob down the row to his usual station. Either an unusual paucity of other attractions, or a fear that

this might be the last fine cricket Saturday of the summer, had drawn an unusual concourse. The Stand was full, the benches were full, the traps were filing in two deep, and a moving mass of people was blocking the space between the carriages and the refreshment-table. Madge gave a sigh of pleasure as the Duke's band struck up the "Gondoliers."

"I like a full meeting, don't you?" she said. "And everybody we know seems to be here. Who will you go to tea with, Mrs. Drysdale?"

"Major Yeats, if I can get hold of him. You don't know him, do you? He belongs to the Gunners. There he is talking to Teddy Barton."

"That big man with the eyeglass? He looks as if Du Maurier had drawn him! Oh, there's True — and Mr. Livingston — and the Hearn — and everybody!"

"Don't fall out of the cart with excitement, my dear, or the wrong man might pick you up. How are you, Beau? What is the score, and how is the game going?"

"I decline to tell you. You do not care a jot for the game in reality, and only assume that air of sporting interest for Yeats' benefit, because you know him to be a cricketer. I shall tell Mrs. Naseby, who will tell Forrester, who will tell it with 'entirely new scenery and dresses,' to Mrs. Cromo Dame, who will appear as chief witness for the plaintiff in the Divorce Court. Yeats, my dear fellow, Mrs. Drysdale is posing for your benefit. Come and tell her it is no use."

The man addressed put his hand on the splash-board of the cart, and began to talk, which left Livingston free to walk round to the other side and Margery.

"So you have really got here in spite of the Professor," he said, taking her hand. "I met him yesterday, and he told me you were going about far too much, and thought of nothing but young men and

the curling tongs, and he was going to put a stop to it. It was quite a surprise to see you here. However, you look very nice, and I am going to take you to have some tea."

"Thank you! Anthony did recommend me to stay at home and try to learn a few domestic virtues; but he has not positively forbidden the young men and the curling tongs as yet. Shall I get out of the cart?"

"Yes, come along." He took her hands in a stronger grasp than many a man years his junior, and swung her lightly to the ground. "Like a bird," he said approvingly. "Look at Mrs. Cromo Dame! She has got on a new gown, and is afraid lest any one should miss it. She need not fear, need she — there is too much emphasis about her to escape notice. She is a woman who is written in italics. Still, to ease her mind, we will go and tell her that we have realised her clothes — it is only when she is in evening dress that one is in danger of losing sight of them."

"Oh, no, please, Mr. Livingston," said Margery, who had heard only the first part of his sentence, and recognised the man leaning on the Cromo Dame carriage door. "I don't know her."

"No, really? You're young — you'll learn. There's Jack Vibart strung upon her parasol point now. Did n't I see you riding with him one day this week?"

"No," said Margery, thankful that she could say so. "I have only ridden three times this week, and that was with Starling."

"It must have been another time then," said Livingston, coolly. "Where are Mrs. Drysdale's boys to-day? She really ought to bring them with her sometimes. I must speak to her. There is hardly another woman here who would not use such useful appendages as an advertisement of her own domestic virtues. Yet she persists in leaving them at home, because she knows they are happier there, and would n't enjoy this at all. Ridiculous, is n't it!"

"How devoted she is to those boys! And yet for some time after I first knew her I did not realise that she had any children."

"Not even the baby? I should have thought it difficult not to realise the baby. But it must be seen to be believed in."

"Yes, I have seen it. It was very good, and didn't howl."

"It is a most respectable baby altogether," said Livingston. "It is exactly like Oswald Drysdale."

"Well, children often do resemble their fathers, don't they?"

"Exactly," he answered, with a curious flash of amusement in his brilliant eyes. "It is one of the most awkward laws of nature."

"If you think they would do better to resemble their mothers, I entirely agree with you, as a general rule," said Margery, innocently. "It seems to me that all the pretty women marry ugly men."

"And vice versa? But I fancy a fair percentage of women would be glad to subscribe to a new law that should entail their children only resembling them, — whatever the other parent might boast in the way of good looks."

But Margery had fortunately turned to True.

"Where were you yesterday afternoon, True?" she was saying. "I went to Friedenhof, and we quite expected you."

"I had to pay a call at Simon's Town. I am so sorry. I would have dropped in on my way back if I had only known."

"I had to go home all alone and unprotected."

"Oh, Lady!" True looked quite distressed. "Was n't there any one else calling there?"

"Only a Captain Ransom, whom I don't know."

"The Drawler!"

"Who?"



"We call him the Drawler. We all have nicknames in the Regiment, you know."

"Oh, — what are the others?"

True hesitated. "Mr. Wright is Silence, and George Tennyson the Bard, — because of his name, not his tendencies," he said in his soft, quick voice. When True saw a difficulty ahead he spoke more softly and quickly than usual. "And Scott Murray, our Adjutant, is Hard Lines, and Mr. Forrester is Pete, and Mr. Cayley, V. C. They mostly come from some ridiculous incident connected with the men."

"Mr. Cayley's name came from his initials, did n't it? I have never met him, though I have often heard of him. Do you ever nickname the senior officers?"

"Sometimes. Won't you have some more tea?"

"No thanks. What do you call Major Vibart?"

A pause.

"The Tracker!"

"What an odd name! Why?"

"I don't know," said True, lying as serenely as he smiled. "Are you going to the *Beatrice* dance, Lady?"

"Yes, unless something dreadful happens to prevent me. Mr. Livingston and Mrs. Drysdale have contrived it for me between them. I am shaking in my shoes for fear something shall happen even now."

"Will you give me some dances?"

"Of course I will."

"Well, let's book them. Look here, I'll write it on my cuff. Can you give me the first?"

"Yes."

"And shall we say five, and ten, and fourteen? I sha'n't put it any later, because I find my partners have to leave to catch trains at Simon's Town."

"But that's four dances."

"Yes, — is it too many?"

"Oh, I don't mind, if you don't! I hope I shall remember. One, and seven, and ten, and fourteen!"

"How are you, Miss Cunningham? What on earth are you doing, Truman?" said a voice, while True was still scribbling busily. It was Captain Barton, — Teddy Barton, with whom Madge had seen Vibart riding. She glanced round her in instinctive apprehension, but she only found Livingston returning to her side.

"I was booking my dances with Miss Cunningham for the *Beatrice* affair," said True, with intention.

"Well, I do call that crafty of you to slip in before us all like that! Miss Cunningham, give me a dance too, will you?"

Margery rather liked Captain Barton. He was a shifty, good-looking Irishman, whose manners were as carefully chosen and as suitable as his clothes; he changed them too, much in the same way. She gave him the two dances he asked for, and then fell into Livingston's hands.

"You have n't asked me to dance with you yet," he said airily. "I suppose you thought I should be too full up, eh? Well, I must see what dances I can give you."

"You are such a confusing person, because you always do things backwards," said Margery, laughing. "Besides, I did n't know that you were going to Simon's Town at all. Do you dance?"

"No, I sit out, and it's much worse."

Something had caught Margery's attention, — only a little opening in the crowd, and a big figure, still some distance away, coming through it — in her direction. She gave her empty cup to True, and turned to Livingston. "Let us go back to Mrs. Drysdale, and arrange our sitting-out dances there," she said. He followed her through the stream of people still pushing their way tea-wards, and together they strolled back slowly to the cart, through the sunshine and the fir-tree stems, flinging salutations about them as they went.

"How d'ye do, Forrester. Good game, eh? We've been following it with the deepest interest. He does n't

believe us, Miss Cunningham. What a low, suspicious mind he must have ! ”

Margery's smile was a little strained ; she was face to face with another acquaintance. “ How do you do, Major Vibart ? ” she said, and walked on with a careless little bow. ( “ Let him go back and hang on her carriage door, if he likes ! I wonder he tore himself away. Perhaps she sent him to get her some tea. She would be afraid of the heat of the crowd herself, — it would melt the paint into streaks all down her face, I should think.” )

Vibart did not have tea, or take Mrs. Cromo Dame any, as it happened. He met Teddy Barton, and went and had a peg with him, and Teddy, who was suffering from a recent impression, remarked that Miss Cunningham was a very pretty girl, and she had given him two dances for the Simon's Town affair next week. “ A nice fresh little girl like that has a good time out here,” he added. “ She was filling her programme right and left. She certainly won't be left on her chaperon's hands.”

“ Oh ! ” said Vibart, thoughtfully.

He had seen Madge with Livingston, and been a little piqued at her careless salutation, and obvious preference for Beau's society ; she had, as he expressed it to himself, “ shelved him ” for the past week, and he supposed that it was a continuation of the shelving. Until the Dodds' moonlight picnic they had ridden together almost daily, and their “ friendship ” had ripened rapidly in the sunshine. It had indeed stopped short at a point where Vibart had realised that it must begin a new stage ; Madge had realised nothing, she had “ just enjoyed ” until Mrs. Cromo Dame appeared upon the horizon, and became a practical demonstration of the unreliability of Man. Madge had disliked the momentary doubt of her own power to charm very much indeed, and in order to reassure herself had practised on the world at large, and dis-

covered that there were other men in it beside Vibart. She had nearly satisfied herself over the reassuring process; if there were a pin-prick, it was still Vibart's defection, but she concealed that as skilfully as an older woman might, and hedged herself in from any passing favours of his on those occasions when she had since met him. Vibart pondered on these things, and drew accurate conclusions; but he saw them anew in the light of other men's preference. He had no objection to making Madge jealous; even a girl so easily managed was as balm to his vanity, and he regarded a reconciliation and renewed influence as an easy task, if he chose to take up the affair where he had put it down. In the mean time Mrs. Cromo Dame was gracious, and he did not hurry after Margery Cunningham; it was not often that the former lady and he paraded their intimacy in public, but once in a while Blanche liked to play at lion-tamer, and Vibart had found it wise to indulge her. She knew how to amuse as well as attract him, and he was content to dangle in her train; but while he dangled, other men found his empty place to their liking, and it seemed that Margery was ready to fill it, which put a new complexion on the matter. Vibart was a sportsman; he had the instincts of the chase, and the game that was ready to fall to his gun was less to be desired in his mind than that which cost time and trouble to obtain, — particularly if he came into competition with another hunter. Margery's tactics might be crude and obvious; but they very much enhanced her value in Vibart's eyes. His conclusions were something like this:

"I wonder if she likes Barton? or Livingston? Barton's a fool, but he's good-looking, and she's too young to be bored with him. Livingston is old enough to be her father, but he's got brains. It's just because she's so fresh and ready to take anything that comes, that she may really shelve me for them, in earnest. I



should n't like that. She is pretty — as Barton said. *He* has never seen her in that pink bonnet thing, with her face tempting you out of the frills — at least I hope he has n't. Confound it, I *do* hope he has n't! I wonder if she tries that sort of thing on every man? I suppose so. Well, she deserves what she gets. What a fool I was not to kiss her then! The third time of seeing her to speak to! Rather hot work, — but of course she meant me to. She almost held up her face for it. She's cold enough now, anyway. Damn the girl! I wish I didn't keep on thinking of her."

Two days after the Cricket match, he called at Vine Lodge, but Madge was out. She came in after some ten minutes, and found him talking to the Professor; seemingly quite satisfied, she left them to their mutual entertainment, and disappeared into the drawing-room, where Vibart could hear her singing. As he was leaving, she came out onto the stoep again to say good-bye, and he contrived to speak to her alone.

"You never told me that you sang."

"Did n't I? I don't profess to, in public. I should be afraid before most people. What a lovely voice Miss Dodd has, by the way, and how well she has been trained!"

"But you could sing to me. I wanted to come into the drawing-room just now, only I thought perhaps I should n't be welcome. You have kept me at such a distance lately."

"I thought you were quite happy talking to Anthony. He prefers to entertain those visitors for whom he has any liking himself."

Vibart did not repeat the experiment. He foresaw that he should be invariably turned over to the Professor's tender mercies. He was genuinely fond of music, and the discovery of Madge's accomplishment in that line aggravated him still further, so that he

regretted the hitch in their intercourse all the more. Margery did not trouble herself with regrets of any kind. Her senses were chiefly on the surface at present; she was magnetic, ductile, responsive to a stronger influence which left her quivering in the same strain after the actual notes were struck, as a harp vibrates after the player's hands have left the strings. The vibration dies away, and the harp-strings are silent until the same hand, or another, produces the same result. Margery ceased to reflect Vibart when he was no longer a daily influence, just as, in the first instance, she had forgotten to ask Starling who he was, though she had recognised his magnetic attraction for her while their eyes met. Whenever she encountered him, he troubled her vaguely for the moment, but she was very busy enjoying herself, and her life was full of delightful impressions, which she thought were experiences.

"The down is not yet brushed from the butterfly's wing," Livingston said to her on the night of the *Beatrice* ball. The *Beatrice* was the flag-ship of those days, and she was giving a dance in Simon's Town with the aid of three sister ships, and all the available social world of the Suburbs. With the exception of the Government House party, every one was there. Madge met her own particular set on the Wynberg platform; she had driven down with the Dodds, and found Mr. and Mrs. Drysdale awaiting her. The Professor, by the mercy of Heaven, had a cold; otherwise it was not impossible that he would have gone too, being, as Starling said, "in the habit of doing undesirable things." He did not dance, but he made free and fearless comments upon the ethics of such amusements, and had almost succeeded in presenting them in such a light to Margery that her soul yearned for a Convent or the Temple of Vesta.

"Am I the butterfly?" said Margery, in response to

Livingston's remark. They were all standing about in groups on the platform, some untoward movement now and then displacing the chrysalis-like wraps and overcoats, and giving a hint of rainbow silks, the gleam of a diamond stud, or the flash of scarlet and gold, for the Duke's and the Wessex and the Gunners were assembling in full force. "I think I *am* rather like a butterfly, — a white butterfly with gold spangles! I wonder if you will like my dress, Mr. Livingston!"

"Why did n't you consult me about it? I have been expecting all along that you would. I hope your shoes match. I am most particular about shoes and fans and gloves matching."

"Yes, they all match. I suppose you would n't have sat out with me, if they had n't?"

"I should promptly have sat *on* you. Freaks of nature ought not to be allowed to go about except in shows, and a girl with black feet, and a pink body, and white gloves is like a cross-breed. Miss Harbord wore a heliotrope frock and violet points to her last dance. I could just bear that, but I did not like it."

"What are you two frivolling over?" said Clarice Drysdale, joining them. "There is V. C., Beau, — have you spoken to him?"

"By Jove, no! I did n't know he had become a Shulamite and 'returned.' He was out beyond Simon's Town somewhere. What possesses the man to come all up here, and then out again, when it was on his way?"

"He dined with his own Mess and dressed there, most likely. I don't suppose he had taken his things out with him. Look at him, Madge! What do you think of him?"

"I can't see anything except an enormous overcoat like they all wear, a very smart red-and-gold cap, and a ragged moustache. He looks to me rather like True."

"He is not at all like True, though. He is the most interesting man in the Duke's, and much more attractive to women than Tracker Vibart, really. He has intuition, Madge, and not one man in twenty has that. He understands what you mean to say, through what you do say. I will introduce him to you presently. But you won't appreciate V. C. for another ten years or so."

"V. C. will make a very good general, some day," said Livingston, "if his brain does not eat up his fighting faculty. Here comes our train! Now, Miss Cunningham, don't rush in your excitement, or you will charge into a carriage containing all your enemies, and have to scowl in their company for the space of one hour. A carefully selected train party is an essential of a dance at Simon's Town. Get in, Mrs. Drysdale, — now, Miss Cunningham. No, don't sit beside your chaperon, as if all men were ravening wolves, and your sole hope lay in her. Come to this opposite seat — that gives three of us a chance, one each side of you and a third in front. Now, who do we want?" (He stood on the platform, outside the carriage door, and placed his arm as a barrier to prevent any one getting in whom he did not choose. Madge sat behind him, laughing irrepressibly.) "Yeats, we must have you, because Mrs. Drysdale is so fond of you. Ossy, you will come too of course, to see that the fondness is reciprocated — as a good husband should. No man likes to see his wife throw away her affection on another man. We can take four each side in these carriages. Miss Harbord, — I want to observe the cut of your new cloak, so we will admit you. That makes five, myself six, — Barton, don't push, my dear fellow, you are not coming in here! V. C., there is room for you, and, Forrester, you may come to make up."

"This carriage seems to be like the Kingdom of Heaven," said the last-named gentleman, gaily, "a difficult place to get into!"



"At all events you are among the elect," retorted Mrs. Drysdale, as he settled himself beside Madge.

"Did you see Mr. Johnnie trying to get into the guard's van?" said Polly Harbord, beginning to laugh. And when Polly began to laugh, every one else followed suit, for the laughter kept on bubbling up between the words, and proved irresistible. "He got confused between the guard, who was a little man in a peaked cap, and True, whom he thought he was following. The last I saw of them was, that it looked like the makings of a good fight, and Mr. Johnnie was punching him in the back and saying, '*I will come in! I will come in!*'"

"Let's ask him how he enjoyed his ride as a piece of luggage," said Mrs. Drysdale. "I hope the guard locked him up as a dangerous lunatic."

"Disgraceful!" said Beau Livingston, in huge delight. "A man of his build and standing attacking a poor little guard!"

"The beauty of it was that Mrs. Johnnie was trying to call him back, and had to be forcibly restrained from hurling herself out of the carriage, by True," added Forrester. "I was just going to the rescue when you called me, Livingston. 'Oh, John! Oh, John!' she kept saying, and a porter who was passing tried to console her. 'All right, Mum — the guard 'll settle 'im,' he said. 'He ain't armed, is 'e? I thought as 'e looked like drink when 'e passed me just now. Ought to know better at 'is age, — but there, it's an 'ot climate, and a long summer we've 'ad! Can't be too 'ard on 'im. I've bin tempted myself at times!'"

There was a roar of delight from Livingston and Oswald Drysdale and Yeats, and the chatter continued more or less uproarious as the train swung backwards and forwards round the curves all along the coast. Madge looked out of the window past Forrester sometimes, and saw the black moving sea, and the gleam of

ship's lights ; it was a fair dry night, and Simon's Town felt degrees warmer than Wynberg, — as indeed it is, — as they walked through the dockyard to the big store buildings where the dance was held.

"We shall never find anything again, I know we sha'n't !" said Mrs. Drysdale, as she reluctantly relinquished her wraps in the cloak-room, and fought for the privilege of changing her shoes. "Good-evening, Mrs. Cromo Dame ! What a lovely night, is n't it ?"

"Rather warm, don't you think ? April is an early month for a dance."

"So she is here," thought Madge, giving a last fond touch to her soft hair. "I am glad I am not dependent on Major Vibart for dances ! I should certainly be a wall-flower. Ready ? Yes, quite !"

Mrs. Drysdale pushed her way through the incoming throng, and passed into the ball-room, Madge following. Madge had never seen anything like that flag-draped ball-room in her experience of provincial Cinderellas at Home, and the lights and colours and uniforms got into her head a little, — particularly the uniforms.

"I did not know you were so nice !" she said ingenuously to Joey Tullock, a clean-faced naval lieutenant who was bristling with gold lace.

"I always knew I was not appreciated !" he returned sadly, as he handed her back her programme. "The tents outside are the best places for sitting out, Miss Cunningham. I arranged them myself."

"Thanks for the hint," said Margery. "I will remember. Oh !"

Joey had turned deftly in half an inch of space, and was wriggling his way through the crowd after the adroit fashion possible to none but a Navy man. But it was not his blue-and-golden person which had drawn forth Madge's exclamation ; she could have bitten her tongue out the next instant for her tribute to Vibart's good looks, but that she did not think any

one heard her. Vibart in musti was a very splendid animal, and always well groomed. But Vibart in uniform was as near the ideal of the admirers of "Illustrated Bits," and Hal Ludlow's pictures therein, as it is possible to come in real life. "A mighty proper man," with his scarlet and gold, his clinking spurs, his whole big form decked as for a Lord Mayor's Show, and his quiet swagger. There was nothing aggressive about Vibart save the unavoidable self-assertion of Nature's triumph in making him. She had really done it exceedingly well, and Madge thought so. He always influenced her when she came into personal contact with him, and she was suddenly caught by the eyes again as he advanced towards her.

"You will give me a dance, Miss Cunningham?"

"Certainly, Major Vibart!"

Neither voice was very steady, and both pairs of eyes looked into each other with a half reluctant admiration — a realisation of something being inevitable now.

"The downward path is easy —  
But there 's no turning back."

Madge knew, in that moment while he scribbled his name on her programme, with his handsome face rather graver than usual, that the rest of the evening was to be as a dream to her, but that Vibart alone would stand out in lurid distinctness; while Vibart was pleasantly conscious of his own quickened pulses, and of something that was almost fear in approaching the small white ethereal thing before him. This was a new feeling and slightly maddening; it was also, probably, more genuine than his usual emotions. Madge's programme was somewhat engaged already, he had to place his name low down before handing it back to her.

"I have taken two," he said, "I hope —"

"Very well."

Then they parted, — Madge to vainly try and enjoy herself in her usual heartwhole fashion, but the moving panorama of flying feet and bright colours, with its attendant music and chatter, — yes, even her own joy in the moment of the dance, — were unreal and shadowed with some presage of Fate. Vibart busied himself with the other women with whom he wished to dance, — Mrs. Cromo Dame among the number, — and stood out occasionally and watched. Once he came across Livingston, and they went and drank together at the refreshment-table which stood at one end of the long dancing floor, while a raised dais for the band filled the other.

“I am as dry as the Karroo in February,” said Livingston. “Whisky and soda, waiter! No whisky? Nonsense! Go into Simon’s Town and get some then. What will you have, Jack?”

“I’ll have a whisky too. Can you manage it, waiter?”

“I daresay I can, sir!”

“What a barbarous custom it is to decree that we shall dance on coffee and injurious sugar-drinks until supper-time!” said Livingston. “That is the worst of admitting children to these entertainments. Why can’t they have a Christmas tree for the middies, and let us have our dances properly whiskied, without fear of contaminating their morals?”

“Jolly little boys!” said Vibart, good-naturedly. “I wish our cubs were half as good stuff. We’ve got a Thing out of the nursery by the last boat, who can’t put on his uniform, and blushes every time Forrester tells a tale at Mess. However, Truman informs me that the Subs are making his life a Hell for him, so perhaps he’ll improve.”

“I would back Wright and Ames and Tennyson to put a polish on most Tenderfoots certainly! Forrester’s yarns are rather stiff sometimes, Jack. He has a



pretty wit, but he talks dirt like a minor poet ! There 's Mrs. Cromo Dame dancing with him now. What magnificent arms the woman has ! ”

“ She would strip well ! ” said Vibart, carelessly, as the waltz ended and the couples streamed past. “ Are you dancing the next, Livingston ? ”

“ Not that I know of. Are you ? ”

“ I believe so, ” Vibart answered, referring to the card. “ Oh — yes ! ” He slipped it back into his pocket, and took up the whisky and soda with a steady hand. Yet his heart was not quite steady when five minutes later he met Madge at the door and told her that it was his dance, and he waited in silence while she shifted her hand from Joey Tullock's arm to his own.

Madge had been secretly waiting for him ; she knew in spite of herself when his dance was coming, and shivered a little as he put his arm round her.

“ This is the second time, ” she thought to herself, her eyes resting vaguely on the silver Greyhound — the Duke's Greyhound — on the lappet of his coat. “ The first time was when we played Tags. How silent he is ! I wonder what he is thinking ? That I don't dance as well as the red-haired woman, I suppose ! — what a very broad chest ! — how appallingly impressive uniform is when you see it so near — I wish I were farther off — I think I am going to be frightened, and it is so silly. ”

“ This is the second time, ” thought Vibart, as she settled herself into the hollow of his bended arm, and pressed backwards for the swing, “ but it won't be the last. ” His hand never tightened on her waist, nor was there anything to startle her ; only his muscles felt like iron to the light weight of her body, and she was happily conscious of going like a bird. She was really sorry when half-way through the dance he stopped, and offered her his arm.

“ Thank you ! ” he said. “ Will you come and sit

out a little now? There are some seats outside — if you are not afraid of the open air?"

"I am not at all afraid, thank you! — (Then I *don't* dance as well as she does!)" Madge added to herself, as they went out of the ball-room, across the landing where a stray couple or so were sitting, and down the wooden steps into the outside world and the velvet night. There was a piece of waste ground round the Store, and here Joey Tullock and his fellows had pitched three or four small tents, and placed a few seats outside as well. Vibart chose a tent, and lifting the flap ushered Madge into the dim light of that retreat. It was all rather strange and silent, and she had a hysterical desire to laugh in default of his lacking conversation.

"This is quite a cosy corner, isn't it?" she said, seating herself in a low basket chair, and trembling with the effort to speak naturally. There was red cloth on the ground; as she stretched out her feet in front of her, she thought how unnaturally small her little white slippers looked.

"Yes," said Vibart, sitting down beside her. There came a pause, through which Madge heard the crickets singing in the night, and Vibart took the fan lying on her knee, and began opening and shutting it idly. "Now tell me what I've done!" he said at last.

"Done? Nothing — that I know of!"

"Yet you will not ride with me!"

"I never said so."

"No, you sent me a polite little note to explain that you had a horse of your own now, and wanted Kaffir no longer, in which you also neatly explained that you were riding with Miss Dodd — that I was not wanted was obvious!"

"I am sorry if you took it in that way; but I daresay you managed to amuse yourself elsewhere."

"You did your best to drive me elsewhere anyway! You will hardly look at me or speak to me when

I meet you, and if I call, you leave me to your brother and run away ! I thought we were to be friends?"

"Yes."

"But you think that is impossible between a man and a woman?"

Margery felt as if the earth shook under her feet, and made a rush for less dangerous ground. "If you think I have been unfriendly," she said, with some difficulty, "I can only say that I am very sorry."

"Will you seal our compact afresh?"

She thought of the sunlight on the blue plumbago hedges, and her outstretched hand that he had kissed. What was possible by day was not to be dared by night.

"I do not acknowledge that I broke the compact!" she said hastily. "I only rode with Starling."

He did not answer, and she looked at him in apprehension. He was regarding her much as a large animal might a small one which it wished to devour, but Margery did not see the similarity. She only felt that the thin skin of their conversation was torn away—that their conventional aspect was worse than wasted. All the light chatter and frivolity of the ball-room seemed suddenly a hideous mockery, all the careless enjoyment, the irresponsible life of the neighbourhood, an insufficient covering for brute Nature after all. Margery made an ineffectual effort to rise, while her eyes were still held fascinated by Vibart's long, uncontrolled gaze.

The night stood still to listen.

For one instant there was a dimly lit tent, two lounging chairs telling their tale of the dance and its physical weariness, and the relaxing of muscles in delicious repose,—two bright figures in scarlet and white leaning a little towards each other, as if they saw something beneath the visible, commonplace scene; as that instant passed, the man leaned down over the girl, the size and weight of his figure obscuring her, and then—alas ! alas !—he had kissed her.

"No!" Vibart said, as she struggled to get free. "Not yet! One moment more — for God's sake, my darling! one moment."

Margery's experience had not yet held a man's voice hoarsened with his own uncurbed feeling. She shrank back quivering, awed by the realisation that she had touched something outside her own capabilities. The passion of the moment was real only in the man; the girl was swept off her mental balance, paralysed by a stronger vitality, but she had nothing to give save fear.

As his lips left hers, Vibart gave an exclamation that was like a suppressed cry. He was feeling too deeply to be fluent, but indeed it never occurred to him to ask for forgiveness. He lifted her to her feet in the same strenuous silence, but even as they stood upright, face to face, there came a sound of laughter and voices, and a man's hand raised the flap of the tent. With one movement Vibart had released Margery almost before he had seized her, and offered her his arm.

"I beg your pardon, Major!" — the intruder was Forrester with Miss Hofman. "All the tents seem taken. We did think we had secured this one!"

"You can have it, for we are just going back to the dancers. Our neglected programmes reproach us!" said Vibart. After all he was equal to the occasion, which in that first horrified moment she had feared he would not be. It gave her a shock to hear the lightness of his tone after his recent passion, but as they crossed the intervening space of outside night to the big Storehouse, from whose doors and windows came a streaming glare like a search-light, he drew the hand on his arm closer to his side, and said something she could not catch. It seemed to be a reference to their second dance, which was yet to come, mingled with undistinguishable tenderness — some love-words that made her heart beat faster again. The figure of Major Yeats, lounging in the doorway of the ball-room, gave her a positive sense of regained security.



"This is my dance, Miss Cunningham!" he remarked quizzically.

"Is it? I am glad I came back in time!"

"In time, forsooth! It is half over!"

"Oh, dear! Let us dance the rest of it then, and lose as little as possible!"

She bowed to Vibart, and turned away, half determined to dance with him no more to-night. "I could tear my frock and have to go to the cloak-room and mend it," she thought. "Or get True to hide me somewhere so that I could n't be found when the time came. Anything would do. It is easy to get out of it. Only — I don't know that I want to — quite! I am horribly frightened, and I did n't like it at all, but I do want to see what he will do and say! After all, lots of girls have been kissed by married men, and it has n't mattered. I daresay most of those here to-night would think nothing of it. And I can always tell him not to. Oh, I think I'll dance with him, and just see!" Margery was very like a child playing with electricity, who does n't like the shock when it comes, but cannot resist trying it just once more.

"Have you had any supper, Miss Cunningham?" Yeats said kindly. He liked the bright-faced girl who seemed as fresh as her white frock, and there was something almost fatherly in his manner as he piloted her to the supper-table and attended to her wants. Margery was almost too excited to eat, but she was a healthy little mortal, and her supper did not come amiss to her. She discovered that her vis-a-vis was True, who was beaming at her from his seat next to Starling. Margery nodded back gaily, and the party was a merry one.

"Try the thing in jelly to your left, Miss Cunningham," said Yeats. "I always try the things in jelly at a ball supper. Experience tells me that they at least are fresh."

"Mr. Livingston says that the pink food is always the best!" remarked Madge, as she prodded the dish in question with a fork. "What is this made of, do you suppose?"

"Oh, don't ask! 'Where the apple reddens,' you know, 'never pry!' You don't want to lose your Eden, do you?"

"I don't think I quite know what you are talking about. Is it a quotation?"

"Of sorts, yes,—

" 'Where the apple reddens  
Never pry —  
Lest we lose our Edens,  
Eve and I!'

Don't you read Browning?"

"I never seem to read anything, nowadays! I am growing very frivolous."

"All the better, at your age! But you might read Browning and find him frivolous too. It is one of the functions of a real poet that he shall have wares to suit every necessity."

"Is frivolity a necessity?" said Starling's soft voice across the table. "You are the first person I ever met with who dared to suggest that Browning could be frivolous, Major Yeats."

"He can be frivolously applied anyhow! I remembered an adaptation of two lines of his to cheap champagne, which appeared in *Punch*, and which recurs to my mind every time I am offered inferior wine —

" 'How mad, and sad, and bad it was —  
But O how it was sweet!'

"But I like sweet champagne," protested Margery, "even if it is cheap."

"And do you like the consequences?" asked Yeats, laughing. "Look ahead, Miss Cunningham. No life can be lived entirely in the present."

For a second the gravity through which his eyes always smiled, as if a little weary of his own knowledge, touched the bright young face at his side. Margery thought that he looked more than ever as if he had been drawn by Du Maurier, — the fine lines of his face, the lines of a Gentleman, and the peculiar air about him of being thorough-bred. She wondered with a pang if he guessed! Was there any betrayal in her manner or Vibart's when they spoke to him at the door of the ball-room? She could not tell even herself why, but she knew that she very much wished to keep Major Yeats's good opinion, and she hoped his chance words meant nothing.

When Vibart came for his second dance Margery was sitting with Mrs. Drysdale. She had hardly seen her chaperon all the evening, but they had seized an unexpected chance and were comparing notes.

"Is it your dance with her, Major Vibart?" Mrs. Drysdale said. "Please don't go and hide her where she can't hear the train bell! I know it will ring soon, and then there will be a stampede, and Ossy will hurry us away without half our clothes."

"My dear Mrs. Drysdale, how extremely shocking! I blush for you already!"

"Oh, well, our outside clothes, of course! We are not returned to the Garden of Eden yet, though Miss Cunningham thinks that Wynberg must be the original Paradise."

How strange it was that every one kept on referring to the same subject! Yeats's quotation returned to Margery's mind, as she rose and sauntered away with Vibart —

"Where the apple reddens  
Never pry —  
Lest we lose our Edens,  
Eve and I!"

"Don't you think I am an exemplary character to be

found under the wing of my chaperon?" she said, gaily.

"I was just thinking how delightful you must be to undertake as a charge!" he returned, in his pleasantest tones. "No anxiety about you, — no hunting out of dark corners, — no dreadful feeling that you are a wall-flower and having anything but a good time! Your success is too evident to be discussed in any way." He laughed a little, and Madge took courage. She could not believe in a frowning future when people laughed. Vibart made no pretence of dancing; he went straight out to the tents again, and finding one empty, stooped his tall head and led his partner in, drawing the flap to afterwards, — even arranging the loose folds on the ground with his foot to assure their remaining closed. Then he turned round, all pretence of lightness gone from his manner and his eyes ablaze, and caught Madge in his arms. There was a confidence in the action that struck her dumb.

"I have been waiting for this for the last hour!" he said. Margery liked the fervour of the tone and the sense of being strongly yet delicately held in his arms. Vibart was too wise to press his advantages. He knew that he had lost his head before, and he did not mean to startle his prey before escape was too difficult. "Don't turn your face away, Madge! You don't mind my kissing you, do you?"

"I don't think you ought to," Madge whispered uneasily.

"Why? What possible harm can it do you?"

No answer, as he knew there would be.

"Are you afraid of being scolded? But no one need know. And surely, if you like to be kind to me and make me happy, that can't be wrong, can it? Do you think it wrong to be happy, Madge?"

"No, but —"

"But it does n't make you happy?"

"I did n't mean that exactly, I meant —"



"Look here, what can it possibly matter to any one else if you and I choose to be all in all to each other? What the eye does n't see, the heart does n't grieve for. We won't tell them. But to touch you, to hold you in my arms, is everything to me. You, in your happy little life, can't realise the hardships and the difficulties that a man has to endure in silence. And my lot has been a pretty dark one, God knows! Surely you won't grudge me a little of your sunshine, Madge?"

The girl put up her hand nervously, and fingered the thick gold shoulder-straps of his uniform without speaking. She was trying to find words whereby to disentangle herself from the web which seemed to be closing round her. It was impossible to refer to his "hard lot" in more definite words than he had done; it was horrible even to suggest that it could do her harm to be made love to, — as a fact she was practically ignorant of what the "harm" could be, her objection being based on a vague tradition that a girl must not approach nearer than within two yards of a man unless he is going to marry her, or has the excuse of dancing, skating, etc., of course. So she stood in silence, troubled by the absence of the prescribed two feet, with Vibart's hand caressing her face and hair tenderly, and his eyes reading her transparent face even more easily than her silence.

"Madge, have n't you any love to give me?"

Still the silence.

"Not even a little?"

"Please don't ask me. You know I ought n't —"

"But people can't be bound by what they are taught they 'ought' or 'ought not' to do, my dear child! It is n't in human nature. You think, because you have been told certain conventional platitudes, that you must n't care for me; but do you think the platitudes will prevent it? Don't look so troubled, — it is

only in Nature that we should come together like this. You can't help it, nor can I. What is the use of saying what we 'ought' to do? — the question is what we have done. I have grown to love you so that I can't give you up — "

"Oh, please don't, you frighten me! And I don't think I ought —, — can see you any more after this."

He held her for a moment in silence. "Madge, do you love me?" he said abruptly.

"I don't know, — I suppose so, — I think I do."

"Can you trust me not to do you any harm?"

"Yes, of course," hastily.

"If it is fine to-morrow night, will you come out into your garden about half-past nine, — I can't get down before, — and I'll join you in the vineyard arbour which you showed me the other day. I want to discuss this with you further, and we may be interrupted any moment now. Will you come?"

"I will try — "

"All right, — your brother goes to sleep after dinner, does n't he? I will come through the gap in the hedge, not round in front of the house at all. For the present I won't worry you any more, my poor little girl! But give me one last kiss, because you are so sweet, and I have got all to-night and to-morrow to get through without you!"

Madge stood on tiptoe and drew his handsome, flushed face down to her own. "You are so tall!" she said tremulously. "Good-night, — Jack!"

"I don't care," she thought recklessly, "I shall believe in him! And I will give him all the love he needs, poor darling!" All through the homeward journey she was busy thinking of Vibart and the strange, unlooked-for turn things had taken, — unlooked-for to her, at any rate, — so that the rest of the party accused her of sleepiness, and tried in vain to rouse her. She heard, as if far away, their joking

voices asking Johnnie Dodd if he meant to fight the engine-driver this time, and drive the train himself into the sea. Only once did she become conscious that True was rolling up his overcoat to make a pillow for her head, and smiled at him gratefully. But they were all shadows of which Vibart was the real substance. The light fabric of the life around her had been rudely torn away, and gave her a glimpse of heaving, seething Nature underneath. Was it always so? Did all these women carry a hidden knowledge of something awfully present and awfully real beneath it all? She shrank with an unexplained horror, the gossip which had fallen heedlessly on her ears assuming sudden strange meanings. What was it? How could raw human passion — ugly, untamable nature — dare to approach the invulnerable guard of conventionality and civilisation? She shut her eyes and would not think.

“Where the apple reddens  
Never pry —  
Lest we lose our Edens,  
Eve and I.”

## CHAPTER VI

*"Lend thy shape for the shame of Eden —  
(And O the bower and the hour!)  
Is not the foe-God weak as the foeman  
When love grows hate in the heart of a woman?"*

THERE was a gymkana on at Kenilworth race-course, the day after the *Beatrice* dance, and Madge wanted to go to it. There was no difficulty about an escort, for Starling had asked her to go with them, and had offered to pick her up, as it was on their way. Madge felt more than ever inclined to go on the day in question, for she rose with a feeling of restlessness upon her, and a disinclination to settle to anything that would allow her to think. If she thought, she must come to some decision about that meeting in the garden, which she did not wish to do. When she dwelt on it, it assumed such grave proportions that all she could find to say about it to herself was "Of course I shall not keep the appointment. He ought never to have suggested it, and I ought never to have said yes for a moment. — Oh, dear, that 'ought' and 'ought not'! It was just what he said did n't weigh a bit, and I could n't help it by merely saying I should. Well, if I can't help it it does n't matter. But of course I need n't go — or if I do, it will only be to tell him to go away." It was much more satisfactory to put the matter out of her mind, and say she would see when the time came. When treated as if it were of no importance, it really seemed of no importance.

"I will go to the gymkana and forget all about it!" said Margery, as she went out onto the stoep before



breakfast. "What a lovely day! I am sorry the grapes are over. I hate to see the vines turning golden and dropping their leaves. What a pity that nothing lasts — even in the sunshine!"

There was one factor in her arrangements, however, of which she had forgotten to dispose. This was the Professor in a bad temper. She had found that he had gone to bed when she returned home at three o'clock in the morning, and by a previous arrangement had knocked at his door and said, "I have come home, Anthony!" to which he had replied by requesting her to stop that row and let him sleep. She had laughed irrepressibly at the time, and wondered with a sudden daring thought if he would ever have found out if she had asked any one in for some refreshment after the long journey, before she went to bed? True had seen her to her own door. "I might just as well have given him a whisky and soda!" thought Madge. "It would have been rather fun to sit and gossip with True on the edge of the precipice of Anthony's wrath, while he slumbered serenely overhead! Really, he would never have known. If I had not come home at all, but had walked in to breakfast he would have been just as wise — and he would n't have sworn at me for disturbing him."

The disturbance seemed to have upset the delicate equilibrium of the Professor's temper. He asked his sister in sarcastic tones what fresh amusement she had on to-day, and when she reluctantly suggested the gymkana, he spoke plainly and to the point on the subject of dissipation.

"I don't like your being out morning, noon, and night like this!" he blustered. "It's not a decent life for any girl. People will say you are not properly looked after — I can't be for ever following you round, you must look after yourself, and see that you don't get talked of as if you were fast."

"But, Anthony," pleaded Margery, trying to be reasonable and calm, and resist the impulse to point out the inaccuracies and inconsistencies of his speech. "It is so very seldom that I am out in the evenings. And if I did stay at home this afternoon there would be nothing for me to do. You know I never neglect the house. If it interfered with your comfort in any way —"

"I don't care, I don't like your being out so much, — do you hear?" (There was little doubt of that. The whole house could hear with his voice at that pitch.) "I won't have my sister spoken of as if she were —" He did pull himself up in time before the actual word, but the blow of the sentence struck Madge almost as hard. "You're for ever fooling with that old ape Livingston, or Truman, or some egregious ass in red trickery! You'd better stay at home for once."

Madge had held her breath for another name, but to be accused of only Beau Livingston and True was such a relief that she took courage. "I shall do nothing of the sort!" she said with sudden spirit. "You do not help to make home so attractive that I wish to stay there, and I shall go out until you are in a better temper!"

She did not stay for the tornado which was to be expected, but made her escape while the Professor was still gathering breath to roar. He was out at luncheon-time, so she avoided another encounter, and when Starling arrived, she drove off with her in good spirits, trying to put the whole matter out of her mind, as she had Vibart and the garden, and proving even more successful. The necessity of such practice in a life lived under the same roof with the Professor, was making Madge an adept in putting things out of her mind. It is unwise to dwell on the fact that you have practically been called something that would not quite bear saying, and sworn at as if you were as little

worthy of consideration as a very much lower animal. Madge was afraid that if she did begin to dwell on these things, she would not remain under the same roof with her half-brother for long, and there was enough pleasure in her present life to balance the occasional storms which she had to weather, and to make her reluctant to allow things to come to a crisis.

She forgot all her troubles as soon as she got into the enclosure before the stand at Kenilworth, with the happy ease of her youth and a nature which was more impressionable than imaginative. Actual things could annoy Madge as long as they were present with her, but she never worried herself with dwelling on them when past, or picturing them afresh in the future. There were half-a-dozen people to speak to, and joke with, and to laugh and talk made sufficient distraction for her at the moment.

"How amazingly fresh you are!" Livingston said to her in greeting. "Here are we with crowsfeet round our eyes, telling the tale of last night's racketing in every sickly smile, and you look as if it had done you good! That is the worst of young people—they are such a horrible warning to the old! I never realised half my own repulsiveness until you appeared." He looked, himself, as spick and span as if he had been going to bed every night at eight o'clock, not a hair out of place, cool, smart, and serene.

"I was very sleepy this morning," Margery confessed. "And Anthony was very cross. Don't you think there ought to be a law to prevent people being cross in their own households? It cannot matter half so much to the outside world, who can walk away and leave them. I could n't walk away, because I wanted my breakfast. It is a melancholy fact that my sensitiveness does not weigh for a moment against eggs and bacon."

"I shall certainly have to chloroform your brother in

one of his own bottles some day," said Livingston, gaily. "Shall we do it together? We shall never have a moment's peace until he is nicely pinned out on a card, and relegated to the genus *Agrestis* — which means bore, of course."

"Poor Anthony! I think I would spare him the card — I hate to see the specimens mounted. They have such little lives, why should n't they enjoy them?"

"My dear Miss Cunningham, your sentiments are quite horribly sentimental — and abominably true. And I have no doubt that the specimens in particular would agree with you. It must be most annoying to be a sacrifice to Science. I never could see any satisfaction in it — for the victim. Apropos of nothing, are you not looking forward to seeing the 'Owl' next week?"

The 'Owl'?"

"The paper, — surely you know the 'Owl'? It is the smartest little local rag that ever veiled naughty scandals in wit. Our Home society papers might go to school to the 'Owl.' I wonder what they will have to say of last night's dance."

"I remember now hearing something about an 'Owl' cake."

"That is it. They give away a cake every week to the local celebrity who has done the stupidest thing within those eight days, — made a fool of himself, or herself, in fact! The beauty of it is that they are nearly always right! Johnnie Dodd has had it twice, and Drysdale once. To take the cake for stupidity is an admirable chastening. Oh, Wynberg would not be Wynberg without its bird of wisdom, to say nothing of the other suburbs."

"Has Anthony ever taken the cake?" asked Anthony's sister with caution, but intense appreciation.

"Not yet, but you have but to wait, — if I know anything of human nature the 'Owl' will yet avenge your



wrongs. It is a witty, wicked little publication. I'll tell you what they suggested about Mrs. Cromo Dame."

"What are you two talking about?" asked Polly Harbord, coming up to them gaily.

"— and so my friend shot the tiger in the jungle!" said Beau, looking straight at Margery.

"Oh, if that is it, I am very glad I came. Do tell me what he was saying, Madge! You don't know that sentence, do you? Mr. Livingston always uses it when he is interrupted in saying something he should not, and with a few — a very few people — it has really been taken for the end of a story."

"We had not reached the point, I am afraid," said Margery, laughing. "So I do not know if Mr. Livingston was going to say anything he should not. If he was, I am rather sorry that you came just then. Who is that girl in pink talking to True, Polly?"

"Where? Oh, that is the Ringden girl. Her people have gone up to Kimberley for her father's health, and they left her here in a boarding-house. She has left that boarding-house, by the way."

"No, has she?" said Livingston. "Did she become too pressing in her attentions to the curate? I know there was a curate staying there, because I saw the greengrocer leaving a perfect load of bananas one day. Have you ever noticed that curates always eat any quantity of banana, Miss Cunningham? They feed upon it constantly, and it makes them pulpy. Go on, Miss Harbord, what was the reason they turned Miss Ringden out?"

"She walked in her sleep," said Polly, with the laughter beginning to punctuate her words. "They said they really couldn't be responsible for her. They never knew where she would be during the night."

"How awkward! I suppose she took a leaf out of Johnnie Dodd's book and said, '*I will come in! I will come in!*'"

Madge joined in the laughter which followed. She had outgrown her objection to Polly's little stories, they only amused her now. She looked at the girl in pink, and said, "Polly, how *can* you! poor girl! I daresay it's a great misfortune for her."

"Not at all," said Livingston. "The misfortune is probably somebody else's doing — or undoing."

"Well, of course it isn't her fault," said Polly. "She could n't help it."

"I have always noticed that the things we cannot help are those for which we are most responsible," remarked Beau. "Shall we go and have tea? I saw Forrester a minute ago. He will take us into the Regimental tent."

As they went through the door in the wall, and down the steep steps to the Paddock, — the new Stand was not built in those days, and the approaches to the old were elementary, — Truman joined them. "Going to have tea?" he said. "Come to our tent, please. The City Club have got one too, — it's not so nice as ours." He fell into step beside Madge and beamed at her. "My little pigs are quite well," he said, in a tone of distinct congratulation. Madge turned and stared at him; some vague idea that she had hitherto mistaken his calling, and that he was a farmer rather than a soldier, floated through her mind. "And the garden is coming on nicely," he added.

"True, what *do* you mean?"

"Are you Mess President this week?" asked Polly. "Or have you only taken over the live-stock?"

"Both. I'm very busy. You see," he said to Madge, "the Regiment which was here before us, left us three little pigs —"

"But where on earth did they get them?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, but they are with us now. I find that fact quite sufficient. They all escaped last Sunday night and rushed round the Camp. I had three

fellows dining with me. They all went to help. It was the best entertainment I have ever succeeded in giving."

"Did you go yourself?"

"No," said True, thoughtfully, "I sat still and waited until it was all over. I see a good deal of the pigs in everyday life. I thought if it were a real distraction to other people they might as well have it."

"How's the garden, True?" Livingston said.

"Coming on, but slowly. It has been rather neglected, but there are plenty of white violets."

"Are there?" said Madge. "Oh, do send me some. I love them."

"Of course I will, — as many as you like. I did n't know you would care for them. Shall I bring them down to-night — after Mess?"

"No," said Margery, with a hurried breath. "Not to-night — I think. Anthony has been so cross all day — if any one came in this evening and disturbed his after-dinner sleep I don't like to think of the consequences."

"I could ask for you — or merely leave them at the door."

"He would be sure to wake or hear an altercation or something," said Madge. "No, don't send them to-night — I am not in such a hurry as all that. I should like them on Wednesday, please. I will wear them to tennis at Traveller's Rest. (What a detestable hypocrite I am! But I can't have him coming to-night. What should I do if they met!) Is n't it a pity that the tennis is nearly over?" she added aloud.

"Yes. But there's hockey later on. Have you joined the Ladies' Club?"

"No, I should like to."

"I am Umpire," said True, serenely. They had reached the tent as he spoke, and found themselves standing by the tables with Clive Forrester and Captain Ransom.

"How d'ye do?" Forrester said. "Is True talking about the Hockey? You know the reason he is Umpire, Miss Cunningham?"

"No, I have only just heard of the Club."

"Well, the ladies wanted an Umpire, but for many reasons they would not have another lady — still less would they have a man. A way out of the difficulty was discovered by some one suggesting that they might have True."

"What a shame!" Margery said, with a glance at True, who stood by smiling.

"I don't mind," he said. "I like being Umpire."

"You bet he does, Miss Cunningham. The girls get lots of tumbles, and True has to pick them all up. I don't think it's fair that he should have it all to himself. There *is* a tale —"

"Shut up, Forrester!" True said, quickly, but smiling as amicably as ever. "Shall I get you some more tea, Lady?"

"No, thanks. I want to go and bet on the races now! Are you going to plunge, Mr. Livingston?"

"No, I shall leave that to Merry Andrew over there!" He pointed with his stick to a horse which the Kaffir groom was trying vainly to lead round the paddock. "Who is riding him?"

"V. C." said Forrester, carelessly. "He will have his work cut out."

"That is the man you said I should n't appreciate yet," said Margery, rather resentfully, to Livingston. "And you never introduced him to me, though he was in our carriage the other night."

"Of course I did n't. I have too much respect for Cayley!"

"I don't know what you mean, but it sounds rude."

"Then don't listen to it. One of the choicest secrets of this life is never to listen to disagreeable things. It would be like acknowledging the acquaintance of an ill-bred person!"



"Well, I sha'n't stay here to run the chance of hearing! True, take me back to the ring, will you, and put half a sovereign on anything you like for me?"

"I'll come too," Polly said. "I want to try the totalisator." Their voices died away into distance. Livingston and Forrester stood for a moment outside the tent, and watched the crowd go by.

"Where's Vibart?" Livingston said suddenly.

"In Cape Town. He is on duty at Government House to-day," Forrester responded. "I wonder if Mrs. Hand-painted Lady would like to ask me the same question? There she goes with her particular friend Miss Montfort."

"They are a pretty pair!" Livingston acknowledged with open amusement. "I doubt if there is much to choose between them."

"Except the wedding-ring. You forget Cromo Dame. He is a small detail, I admit. Still he *is* a detail."

"Don't meddle with Miss Montfort, whatever you do," said Beau, as he lifted his hat gracefully to the lady in question. "When a woman knows how to dress as well as that, she has brains."

"No tha-anks! Don't care to come after the Tracker. He ran her to earth first."

"He's a clever devil to play those two women together—I'd rather tackle them a thousand miles or so apart."

"Oh, he's dropped Miss Montfort long since. She's after V. C., and the Tracker's got another attraction! He's on the trail already," Forrester laughed significantly.

"How about that Up Country work that V. C. was after? Will he get it?"

"What do you think?" said Forrester, coolly, as he lit a cigarette. "He is useful to keep Miss Montfort employed!"—he paused and blew out the match.

"If he were away the Tracker might find himself in difficulties, — so — I think — V. C. will be — " The match was tossed lightly onto the burnt grass.

"What a fool V. C. must be to spin his own snare like that!" said Livingston, looking down at the match as though he spoke of it. "He might reckon on being tossed aside. It's a pity he bets — his energies might be better expended."

Forrester blew a ring of smoke into the clear air. "'So the fool was stripped to his foolish hide!'" he hummed. "Heard that our new Chief is coming out?"

"No! Have they really found you a Colonel at last? Vibart is still in command, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, until this new man takes it over. Then he is going Home."

"Do you know him?"

"Who? The Colonel? No. He's been in the 1st Batta'ion for ages — he's quite an old fellow. I should think they hope to finish him up out here! We hear that he has been a beauty in his day."

"When does he come?"

"Let's see — this is April. About July, I expect."

"Vibart did n't tell me he was going Home," Livingston said deliberately. "But I suppose he did n't know himself until lately. He will leave many widows behind!"

"He will leave many things behind — unofficially!" said Forrester, carelessly. "There's the starting bell! Come along — V. C. is riding."

Years afterwards that scene came back to Margery, though she was not especially interested at the moment; but the long, wind-swept race-course, the broken land all round, the velvet line of mountains drifting away into infinite distance, and the sloping sunlight on the Flats, always brought that particular race to her mind, and she thought that the man who came in so cleanly

past the post and gained such thunders of applause, had been happier if his mount had succeeded in throwing him and trampling out his life in the moment of his triumph, for V. C. won, and Madge went home the richer by three pounds for the half-sovereign she had staked on Merry Andrew.

She drove home with the Dodds and True. Mrs. Johnnie was prone to "mother" Margery, which did her good, and Starling left a wholesome flavour in her mouth. Coupled with the pleasure of the afternoon, and the release from any strain on her temper, the effect on Madge was one of righteousness and peace. She dressed for dinner with unusual care, and with some idea of pleasing her brother, not of arraying herself for the rendezvous in the garden, which she had decided not to keep. "I won't go out at all," she thought. "He may think I could n't come, or he may not — I don't care which. If the latter, so much the better, for then he won't try it on again. I *shall* be sorry if it all comes to an end — there is no denying it. I don't dare to think how fond I have grown of him. But that's no reason why I should meet him under the rose after dark. I am almost sure Starling would n't, — Polly might, out of sheer devilment, and I dare say there would be no harm in it, but — I think I won't."

"I want to be petted to-night — oh, so badly! How I envy Starling! There is always some one to admire her and make a fuss over her. If only some one would over me! — but the one person who would like to I have to snub! I wish Anthony would just say one little approving sentence to me now and then — it would be so much easier to try and make things go as he pleases, and I should n't want other people to praise me so much. But he never gets beyond a grunt — you can't make anything out of a grunt!" (She laughed at her reflection in the glass.) "You look

rather nice, Madge! I must say it, because no one else will. I like you in white fluffy things, my dear, and you have done your hair very nicely. Perhaps Anthony will notice me to-night, and say I look 'decent'—I think that is his highest praise. At any rate I'll be very sweet to him."

She was already in her place when the Professor came in to dinner, remembering that he disliked being kept waiting. He took his place in silence, and helped himself to fish without looking at his sister. The radiant brightness of her face faded a little, but she spoke courteously down the daintily dressed table.

"Did you go for a ride, Anthony?"

"Yes."

The monosyllable was not encouraging. Madge tried again.

"Where did you go?"

"Out towards Groote Schuur."

"Oh, how pretty it must have looked this afternoon! Wasn't the light lovely?"

"I wish you would eat your dinner, and not keep on chattering!" said the Professor. "You know I hate having to talk with my mouth full. It's a disgusting habit—which does n't appear to have occurred to you!"

Margery flushed with mortification. She allowed three courses to slide away before she made another attempt, and then was careful to speak while the dishes were removed.

"Shall we have our coffee on the stoep to-night? It is quite warm out of doors. Or would you rather have it here as usual? I thought perhaps the stoep would be a change."

"I shall have mine here. I have no desire to catch cold—it is absurd to think of sitting out of doors on an April night, as if it were February! However"—with an eminently disagreeable laugh—



"pray do so if you like ! I am sure I don't want to detain you here. You are quite at liberty to go. You generally do as you please without any reference to my wishes !"

All her patient efforts and forbearance since she had come out from England, rose up before Margery's mind in grinning mockery. How many times at first had she submitted her plans for the day only to be told to do as she pleased as long as she did not bother (the Professor felt no slightest interest in her unimportant comings and goings ! ) and the meals were properly cooked and punctual ! A great rage at the injustice of the attack seized her, and she looked at him down the table with brilliantly wet eyes. It was on the tip of her tongue to say that she would take him at his word for the future ; and then with a last saving grace her own tears quenched her wrath. She got up indeed to leave the room, but as she passed her brother's chair she paused and laid a generous little hand on his shoulder. It was the nearest thing to a caress that she had ever offered him.

"You *are* cross, Anthony, but I did n't mean to bother you really. I only thought we might have sat and talked a little after dinner to-night. It's so dull in the evenings !" said Madge, with a little sigh for the amusement forborne, and her own good resolutions.

But the Professor's patience had been taxed as far as he ever allowed it, and his sister's touch had made him jump, being totally unexpected. He was a nervous man, and he found jumping painful ; when Anthony Cunningham suffered inconvenience of any kind he generally turned and rent the thing nearest him that was weaker than himself. With an oath, he seized the girl's hand as it lay lightly on his shoulder, and flung her from him with such violence that she nearly fell, the attack taking her absolutely by surprise in her turn.

"You damned little fool!" he exclaimed. "What on earth do you want trying to paw me, and startling me like that? Go to the devil, if you like — but let me alone if you are wise! I won't have it, do you hear?" (The servants did, and said that, "Massa was screechin' like a devil!") "You 've gone contrary to my wishes all day, and I don't want to see any more of you to-night —"

But Margery had fled. She ran swiftly and blindly through the house along the stoep, and down into the solemn darkness of the garden which stretched dim arms of trees to receive her, and drew her into the night. She could not run and cry too, but she panted against the sobs, until she threw herself down in the arbour, and lay there, quivering and shaking through every excitable nerve and pulse.

"He struck me — almost — Oh, he will strike me before we have done!" she gasped, cowering down against the warm ground. The arbour was roughly formed of two large-leaved trees laced together, and the seat was simply a broad step cut in the high bank which bounded the vineyard. The trees grew each side of the step, which had become overgrown with green turf, but was perfectly dry and soft. Margery lay full length on this turf-seat, hardly conscious of anything but the relief of the stillness and darkness and the touch of the grass beneath her, which somehow comforted her as though Mother Earth were really extending a healing power through every blade and the rustle of the giant leaves close overhead. The vineyard was on a lower level than the house, some feet below the drive and the flower garden, from which a flight of stone steps led down into it, and the arbour being at the further end she felt herself a long way off from Anthony, and that terrible dinner-table, and all the horror of the last half-hour.

After a while she grew quieter. Her jarred nerves

quivered into the silence, and she sat up and pushed back the loosened hair from her face. "I will never touch him again willingly," she said with set lips. "I will be his housekeeper, and see that things go smoothly for the sake of my board and lodging. Beyond that we will be less to each other than many a master and servant. I will go my own way, as he advised — 'to the devil,' if the fancy takes me!" She sat still on the grassy seat, her hands clasped on her knees, and her face turned blindly to the vineyard. She had forgotten Vibart, everything but the crisis she had come through, and she remained motionless, waiting for the patience of the night to sink into her heart and dissipate the horrible mental pain and fear that were gradually dying out of her brain. But even as she sat there, a soft white blot upon the darkness of the arbour, something caught her ear,—her clasped hands tightened, and she turned her face with quickened breath, and remembrance struggling back to her mind.

What was it? A rustling of leaves, — the moving of boughs, — a step, as if some one had leapt lightly down the bank below the lane; then silence, while Madge and that Something approaching her, both waited to see if it had been overheard; then a quick, impatient tread coming along the path, and then a dark form blotting out the entrance of the arbour, and while she still held her breath, two arms outstretched to her into which she sprang.

"Madge!" Vibart whispered laughing. "Are you sure no one heard me?"

"You can hide in the bushes if they did!" she whispered back recklessly. A sudden reaction from her former mood of prudence, and then the later strain, were making her feel as if she were light-headed. With less reserve than she had ever shown him, she put her bare arms round his neck and caressed him.

"You darling, how nice you look!" he said press-

ing her fondly, and then holding her away from him to look at her. "What a pretty frock!"

"Oh, you are appreciative!" Madge said with a little sympathetic sigh for her past disappointment. "Do you know, I thought I looked rather nice to-night!"

"Of course you do—you are the prettiest girl round about here, and it is perfectly sweet of you to make yourself so nice for me!" Margery did not contradict him, or tell him how nearly she had not come at all. She turned with a shudder from the mere remembrance of her good intentions, connected as they were with her brother, and basked in Vibart's approval. They sat down on the wide grassy seat, and he put his arm round her, and expressed a tender anxiety as to her bare arms and neck—would she catch cold?—was she sure she was warm enough? It was delightful to be so much considered and petted. "Let me wrap you in my riding cloak," he said, hastily divesting himself of the heavy folds which afforded him a safe disguise. Madge could see the gold lace on his uniform glimmer in the starlit darkness. "Your arms are quite cold!—how nice and soft too, ar'n't they?"

"Oh, no, do keep your cloak!" she said, pushing his head away gently as he stooped to press his lips to the smooth chilled skin. "I am afraid you might be seen."

"I am quite safe in here. I threw this thing on and came straight down from Mess, on the plea of writing official letters, and seeing Livingston!"

They both laughed softly. "How fortunate that he lives near here, and that you must take the same road to reach him and us!" she said. "But supposing some one had been coming down too, and had offered to walk with you?"

"I don't think they would!" said the Tracker, with a peculiar smile. "Anyhow I should have managed to



turn up somehow. I could stay away from Mess if that were all. Now tell me what you have been doing all day ! ”

He said no more of talking over the question of their greater intercourse, or persuading her, as he had done formerly ; perhaps he recognised that some unknown agency had done it for him. Madge lingered as long as she dared, and then stood with fast beating heart while he made his stealthy way back through the gap in the hedge, and she heard his steps die away safely down the lane. She laughed a little as she went back to the house, there had been something so suggestive of a burglar in Vibart's cloaked figure, — the whole incident was rather amusing, and he had so entered into the spirit of the thing that it doubled the enjoyment. It was so charming to laugh ! And somehow the affair was beginning to be exciting and intensely interesting, but no more serious or terrifying. One could not be solemn with a fellow-conspirator who was so gay, so thoroughly a *bon camarade*. Only one sentence afterwards recurred to her mind to puzzle her ; he had several times referred to their being “ all in all to each other ” with a note of deeper passion in his voice. What did he mean ? But the next moment she remembered the pressure of his arms and his tenderness only, and forgot the mere words. She blushed happily, and her senses lulled her brain to rest and not to question.

As her foot crossed the threshold of the house her lips tightened. She went straight to her room without meeting her brother again that night, but if anything were wanted to harden her in the course she was pursuing it was ready to hand in the memory of him. Her last thought was, however, again of Vibart, and she smiled a little as she fell asleep.

## CHAPTER VII

*"Only of one tree eat not in Eden ;  
(And O the bower and the hour !)  
All save one I give to thy freewill, —  
The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil."*

WHATEVER his disadvantages as a domestic companion might be, Professor Cunningham possessed a certain value to the world at large, particularly that portion of it devoted to the Science of Insect Life. He was an authority on Coleoptera, and he was writing a treatise on the larva of a particularly repulsive Articulate, which absorbed his time. In a moment of expansion he once described a portion of his morning's researches at the luncheon-table to his sister, who did her best not to shudder. A curious malformation had come under his notice in the elytra of a certain bug, and he mentioned it as a point of unavoidable interest, even to Madge, who quietly pushed away her plate as soon as she began to follow the thread of his discourse, and ate no more at that meal. She did not tell him so, but the dread of her life was the common or kitchen black beetle, — blatta, the Professor would have called it, — and the fear of his living specimens escaping kept her religiously out of his study.

She did not, under these circumstances, care to express much interest in his pursuits, and knew as little as possible of what went on behind the green baize door which closed him in from half-past nine in the morning until half-past one, and frequently in the later hours of the day. It was a total surprise, therefore, when he announced one morning that he was going away for a week or ten days to Grahamstown in a

search for bacteriological information at the Institute there. Bacteria were not rightly his branch of science, but a side issue in an entomological journal had opened up a question of some interest to him, and he required certain data to establish the relationship of bacteria and the lowest forms of insect life, such as—

“Oh!” interrupted Madge, with polite haste, “and when do you think of going?”

“I am starting on Monday,” said the Professor,—this was Friday. “You need not pack my bag until the Sunday night.”

(“I forgot I was valet as well as housekeeper and head cook!” thought Madge. “I am certain to put in all the wrong things, and fold the others so that they crease. And Anthony is so particular!”) “And how long do you think of staying?” she asked.

“How can I possibly tell!” said her brother, testily. “It depends on the work I find to do, and various other things. I am not likely to be away more than a fortnight in any case. It will be a little holiday for me, and set me up for the winter.”

“I suppose you wish the house to go on in your absence the same as when you are here?”

“Of course.”

She had purposely not suggested the propriety of having any one to stay with her, hoping that if she took it for granted that she should remain alone he would do so also; but a hot blush dyed her face suddenly as she realised why she did not want an older woman with her. Eyes sharper than her brother’s, and some one who would not go to sleep after dinner or take solitary rides in the afternoon, were not desirable to Madge just now. She said, “I will see about your clothes, if you will just put out what you want packed,” and dropped the subject. It was the longest conversation she had had with her brother since he had thrown her from him after the disastrous dinner, and that was some

weeks ago. The hot-house properties of the neighbourhood had had their influence on her intimacy with Vibart in the mean time. Nothing of mental growth stands still, but in Wynberg events develop from incidents as tall plants do from tiny seeds.

Anthony Cunningham ordered his horse, as usual, at four o'clock that afternoon, and Madge saw him ride away in the sunshine as she stood at the drawing-room window. It was still unusually hot for the time of year, and every available air space was open. Madge had contrived to make her drawing-room pretty, in spite of the furniture, and she sat down by the tea-table as if waiting for some one. At twenty minutes past four he came — an irreproachable caller, come to pay a formal visit, until the Kaffir girl had announced, "Majore Vibet," and her soft flat-footed tread had departed. With the shutting of the door, Vibart's conventional approach to his hostess vanished. He kissed her warmly, and drew her down onto the sofa beside him.

"I'm sorry I could n't come round last night, little woman," he said. "And I sha'n't be able to come to-night, I'm afraid. It's guest night this week, instead of Tuesday."

"So it is — what a bother ! Perhaps it's safer though. I'm always afraid of the servants seeing me come in. Jack, I've got some news for you. Will you have some tea?"

"Please. What's the news? Come and sit beside me again when you've poured the tea out — I don't like you all across the room."

Margery laughed at him radiantly, over the tea-service, and handed him his cup. "Anthony calmly announced, this morning, that he was going away!" she said, as she sat down beside him again.

"The deuce he is ! When?"

"On Monday."

"And you?"



"I am to stop here in lonely splendour!"

"By Jove, that 's just what we wanted!" A shade of something — calculation or thought — crossed his face. He glanced at Madge as if considering, but apparently abandoned his project. "We 'll have a fine time, won't we, ma mie? I 'm sorry I 'm so taken up with the General just now, but I don't see why that should interfere."

"You must n't come here too often," Margery said, with intentional coquetry. "It would n't be wise, you know."

"What do you call too often?" he laughed, as he set the empty cups down, and with a sudden movement lifted her onto his knee. She had been persuaded into that position before, but he had never taken it so abruptly for granted. She gave a little cry and tried to shake herself free.

"Don't be so rough, Jack! No, I sha'n't be picked up like a baby. Let me go and sing you something — I 've got a new song."

But he would not let her go on this occasion, though as a rule he was ready and willing enough to listen to her. Madge had managed their intercourse with a skill which might have failed a more experienced woman: she had sung and played to him; they had talked together and been companions as well as lovers. She would not submit to too much love-making, which had had the effect of whetting Vibart's appetite and keeping him all the keener for any opportunity she gave him. Perhaps if her heart had been really involved, she would have been less successful with him; but there was the excitement and the amusment of testing her power to stimulate her, and she alternately teased and petted, and always contrived to charm her captive afresh.

"I sha'n't let you go!" he said, laughing softly. "Do you know I could crumple you up like a roseleaf!

How easy it would be to strangle you ! ” His large hand closed on her soft throat, and she felt the powerful fingers press with a suggestion of what they could do.

“ Oh ! — oh, don’t ! ” she gasped with a sudden fright, struggling in his arms. “ You always frighten me when I feel how strong you are ! ” she added, as he released her.

“ Most women like strength — even brute force ! ”

“ Yes, I like to *think* you are strong — that is n’t it. It’s when I feel it — I can’t bear to realise that you have got me, and I am entirely in your hands ! ”

“ But I want you to be entirely in my hands ! We ought to be all in all to each other ! ”

She shrank a little from the look in his eyes, and his hot breath on her face, and releasing herself from his arms took her former place on the sofa at his side.

“ I don’t know what you mean ! ” she said, half pettishly. “ We could n’t be more to each other than we are. You know ” — the hot blood in her face spoke first — “ that I love you. We can’t be anything nearer.”

“ Yes, but we can ! we can ! ” he said, in a breathless whisper. Her ignorant words seemed suddenly to have transformed him and broken down his guard. He slipped down on his knees beside her, and, encircling her with his arms, looked up in her face with eyes which prayed for something his lips kept mute. Margery laid a trembling hand on his broad shoulder and tried to push him away ; once again, as when he had stood at her knee to shorten her stirrup, she thought how large and overpowering he was, and he seemed to her to have suddenly gone insane from no cause. He was madly kissing her breast, — the delicate laces of her white gown kept a sense of masculinity in the smell of smoke for days afterwards, — and uttered a half-impatient exclamation, which sounded like distress, when she succeeded in freeing herself and jumped up.

"No, you don't understand!" he said.

"Indeed I don't — and I think you ought to be going. Anthony will be in soon." Madge was severely practical in a moment, and decided that a more level tone to their companionship might not be inadvisable for the future. She had great faith in the effect of an "ordinary manner" in managing emotions, and congratulated herself on her success, when she might better have done so on Vibart's self-control. On thinking over the afternoon, however, she was vaguely uncomfortable. There was a suggestion of licence in Vibart's manner which had made rapid strides. She did not like it, and began to be beset with dread lest her influence over him might not be strong enough, some day, to prevent his doing or saying "something she did not like," — the phrase was as vague as her foreboding. In any case she was relieved when told that she would not see him for a day or so. He was very busy, and was unable to keep tryst in the harbour even for a few minutes at night. Professor Cunningham left home on the Monday morning early, and Märgery had the whole day, undisturbed by his moral influence, in which to make good resolutions. It was a noticeable fact, that, when unfretted by his neighbourhood, she recovered her moral balance and reasoned herself into a less disastrous recklessness than the Professor managed to bring forth.

Madge had not seen Mrs. Drysdale for a week or two; one of the precious boys and the respectable baby had developed measles, and Clarice shut herself in behind a carbolic sheet, from which she communicated only with Ossy and the remaining boy, and was oblivious of any one else outside the nursery. Madge had assiduously called to inquire, and left fruit and flowers, but had not, of course, been admitted, and missed her first friend's influence and counsel. She felt, sometimes, that she would like to confide the

growing tangle of her life to an older woman, but Fate seemed to have removed all succour far from her. Starling and Mrs. Dodd were gone to Caledon with Mr. Johnnie, who occasionally took flying trips when the money burned too hotly in his pocket, and swept his wife and daughter away on unexpected jaunts, like an elephantine whirlwind; and with the removal of Mrs. Dodd and Mrs. Drysdale beyond the reach of rescue, Margery sank back into her former state of drifting, with a current too strong for her, and, with the plasticity of youth, fell into the ways of thought and the views of life taken by the only associate offered her at the time, and became, though she did not know it, a passive reflector of "Jack's" ingenious sophistries and maxims.

It was the physical part of Margery which was represented in Vibart's mind, without any meaning attached to it. When he thought of her, her eyes were always two glimpses of blue between the lines of lashes, because she had a trick of lowering the lids quickly and glancing up as she did so — the expression in them passed him by; likewise her hair was fine and thick — cobwebs shot with sunshine — and piled high on her head; it suggested nothing of artistic effect to him; but he felt that he wanted to plunge his fingers into its masses, and test its softness. Her round young face, tilted upwards as a flower to the sun, her parted lips (his own smoked for them), her light poised body and ripening form, expressed nothing for his brain to recognise; he wanted to touch her, to finger and prove what his senses caught at; but beyond acknowledging a mental quickness in her, she might have been an alert little animal to his comprehension. Constant intercourse with this point of view is bound to have a certain materializing effect on the finest mind. Margery was beginning to think of herself as a Body, without an abstract Personality at all.

She had no visitors on the day of her brother's de-



parture ; Vibart had written her a note saying that he had to be in Cape Town all day, and should probably sleep there. She need not expect him until the morrow. The letter was brought by his soldier servant ; but when Madge opened it she found that it was in French, a safeguard over which she smiled a little.

"I am rather glad he cannot come to-night," she thought. "I wonder if I have the courage to put a stop to the whole affair? We cannot go any further — he frightened me the other day — and I don't know what he means." She went out into the dreamy afternoon which had kissed the garden with a golden kiss and made everything soft and warm to look at, as well as feel. There was not a breath of wind stirring, and the heat had been so great all day that she had kept in the house. "The worst of it is that when I am with him he can always persuade me — I feel I can't say No to anything he asks. It must be because he is handsome." (She was judging by externals after her newly acquired habit, and with the elementariness of her years.) "All the women round here admire him too, whatever they say of him ! I am glad he is mine, and no one else's." She took out the letter and re-read the sentence which assured her of this fact. It was too flowery when translated, but it fell as prettily as music in the French. Vibart was an excellent linguist, and had wooed as many women on paper as *viva voce*. This probable cause of his facility did not however occur to Margery, who sat in the relaxing warmth of the afternoon and allowed her thoughts to dwell on his strongly coloured eyes, the silky softness of his moustache, and his undeniable figure. If she had been questioned, she would have said that she was passionately in love with him, and it was true that the sound of his step made her pulse start, and her senses answered his at the first touch. Nevertheless she half formed a resolution to "give it all up," as she said

vaguely to herself, sitting among the sun-warmed roses, whose faint scent but ill fulfilled the promise of their gorgeous colour. Little round red roses they were, as deep and bright as blood, but without half the scent of an English "Gens de Bataille."

"I will try and tell him that we can't go any further, so we must stop!" she thought practically, as if a man's passion which she had done her best to rouse and foster were as easily laid down as a book of which she did not care to read the end. She felt almost satisfied with her decision, and sat there until the sun dropped down behind the mountains, while the whole garden preached her an unheeded sermon on the unalterable change and advance of earthly things, — the bud growing to blossom, the blossom running to seed, the seed fulfilling its destiny and multiplying the original stock. There is no standing still with Nature.

But as the evening fell and deepened into night, an intolerable restlessness seized Margery; she wandered upstairs after dinner and looked at all her prettiest things, and buried herself in the recesses of a hanging wardrobe, and then tossed the dainty fripperies aside, and, leaving the room strewn, went downstairs to her brother's laboratory. It was dark, and smelt strongly of chemicals; she drew back with a sniff of disgust and closed the door. The memory of his discourses on elytra and tracheæ and stomata prevented her penetrating further, even without her horror of black beetles. The house felt intensely large and dark, and she wandered about it aimlessly. Her resolutions in the sunshine seemed suddenly dwarfed and puny at night; she doubted their strength, and it terrified her. If only she had asked Polly to come in and talk to her, or had had some one to stay in Anthony's absence! It was horribly lonely.

She opened the hall door aimlessly after a while, and went out onto the stoep; the great heat of the day had

baked the earth, which was still warm and throwing up heat in the darkness. Margery started back with an exclamation as the sudden warmth rose round her, for the outside world was hotter than the house; it felt as though she had come within measurable distance of a furnace, or as though the internal fire said to be in the centre of the globe were burning just underfoot. Two lines of a verse recurred to her mind to frighten her, —

“ We meet in an evil land  
That is near to the gates of hell,”—

it added the last touch to her overwrought mood, and she glanced round her, panting, as if she almost expected to see the sullen red fires glaring out of the darkness.

The outside world was very dark and still, though the sky was like a diamond mine, every star a jewel cut and polished and set in unfathomable blackness. A fitful little wind played among the bushes, and the keen piercing note of the crickets filled the air with unbroken cadence. It reminded Margery of the dance at Simon's Town, and the little dim tent where she had sat with Vibart, listening mechanically to the same sound. She sat down on the edge of the stoep in the stream of light from the hall behind her, and started with every falling leaf. The night was full of slight noises, and charged with electricity. When a cat ran across the garden to the tennis court, she caught her breath and nearly shrieked, and the sound of a clock striking ten in the house behind her jarred on her nerves. She seemed to possess an extra power of hearing, and caught the sense of sounds long before they could be definitely heard. There were a horse's hoofs beating somewhere along the road from Main's Avenue — hardly out of the Avenue as yet, but she felt them coming, and strained her ears through the audible night. It

was no surprise to her when the vague sounds fell into the regular rhythm of hoofs; but even the sharp click of a daylight trot was dulled and muffled mysteriously now, half lost on the sand and fir-needles with which the road was carpeted. Margery held her breath, — something unexplained, which she feared beyond words, seemed coming towards her with every hoof-beat; the horse was trotting along by the hedge now, it turned in at the open gate and was coming down the lane. Who was riding to Camp so late?

Suddenly the friendly stream of light was extinguished behind her. She heard some one switch off the light and close the door, without looking out and seeing her. She wanted to cry out, but her voice dried up in her throat, and the security of the lighted house was withdrawn. Then she reminded herself that she could get in through the windows of the morning-room whenever she wished, as the servants had orders to leave the fastening of the window to her, and she rose from her seat on the stoep to walk round to that side of the house. But the horse was passing down the lane, and as she moved her figure was vaguely discernible through the darkness; the rider hesitated, and dismounted, hitching the animal up to a tree, while Margery stood as if rooted to the ground. The next moment she went forward blindly, straight down the drive.

"Oh, why did you come? Where did you come from?" she said under her breath, with a swift glance back at the house. The lights were all out on this side; it stood black and sentinel-like, a lifeless thing in the living night.

A voice came out of the darkness, softly, relentlessly, "I have only just got back. I did not stay in town after all, and I felt I must ride down this way, just to pass the house. My darling, what luck to find you here!"



"Oh, I oughtn't to be — I meant to go to bed. But they have shut me out by mistake —"

"By Jove! have they? Do they know you are out here?"

"No, but I can get in through the morning-room window as usual. They think I have gone to bed. Anthony is away you know, he went this morning."

"H'm!" . . . There was an instant's pause while the girl's figure was folded into the rider's heavy cloak. "Come and sit in the vineyard — do!" he whispered. "Just for a few minutes. Kaffir will be all right." He twisted another knot in the rein, and backed the horse under the high hedge behind some bushes, without letting go of Margery's hand. Her spirits had suddenly risen, and she felt intoxicatingly gay; fear and instinct, the warders of the daylight, vanished in the excusing darkness under the spell of Vibart's presence, and she was only conscious of her momentary happiness — the warmth of the great earth — the mystery of the night — the nearness of human touch and a nameless attraction which drew them as usual close together. It was all a dream as they sat above the vines in the bower of giant leaves, side by side on the wide turf seat, with his riding cloak wrapped round them, like a shroud binding their two bodies together. It frightened her for a moment to be so close to him, and to feel the reality of his breast rising and falling stormily beneath her, as she half leaned, half lay in his arms. It was as if she had put her hand on the pulse of life, and shook to know its power.

The pagan warmth of the earth was their inheritance, and the darkness the lure rather than the veil of irreclaimable Nature. But the law of the Garden of Eden remained the same as when it had been first uttered in awful certainty —

"And ye shall be as Gods, knowing Good and Evil."

. . . . .

Day rose golden over the vineyard, taking the earth by storm, and drenching the stripped vines in a bath of sunshine. The outlined mountains were transparent purple against a far blue sky, and all the view — green trees, red-roofed cottages, and winding white roads — had caught the joyousness of morning and danced with light.

A window went up in Vine Lodge, and some one threw back the green shutters. Margery leaned out and sniffed the morning, wondering at herself. She had thought as she crept to bed the night before, that the daylight would make her shudder, and had pictured herself ashamed to wake up again. But she proved the elasticity of uncondemned human nature, and with the thought, "No one knows!" came also relief, and a sudden loss of guilt. Fear of discovery has a great deal to do with virtue; but not even fear of discovery, or the world's loud-voiced condemnation, makes repentance. The accuser must be within us to make his voice really heard — to be sorry that we are found out is a very different thing to being sorry for what we have done! A confusion between the two has been one of the scandals of morality. At this stage of her existence Margery found that the backsliding of which no one knew did not weigh heavier on her than thistledown. She threw off her dread and dismay with the night, and revelled in the new-created day.

"I shall go down and walk about the garden until breakfast," she said, letting down the sunshiny mass of her hair. As she did so she caught sight of her own face in the glass, and flushed a sudden rosy red. "Oh, thank God, no one knows!" she exclaimed. "And it will never happen again — I won't even put myself in a position where he has a chance to ask."

Even the criminal feels a chance of redemption in the morning; Margery ate her breakfast as usual, though she neglected her toast and drank her tea as if

she were feverish. But as the hot day drew onward she became more and more silent, and started guiltily at every sound about the house. It was a mood due to over-wrought nerves rather than remorse, and she lost it momentarily when Polly Harbord came in about the middle of the morning to give her the last flying news of the neighbourhood.

"Mrs. Wrighton is suddenly coming out!" she said. "We are giving a tennis party next week. Could you have believed it? I am sure I don't know what the courts will be like. They have n't been played on for ages."

"Get True to give you his valuable advice on the subject," said Madge, amused and interested at once. "But what a resurrection, Polly! I thought Mrs. Wrighton was in bed with something or other?"

"Nerves!" said Polly, her eyes narrowing with laughter. "So she was, but Doctor Langdon said she needed distraction, and ought to rouse herself and see more company. Hence we launch out!"

"Was that your idea?"

"Well! — I only said I was dull, and I did wish we 'kept more company,' as the cooks say!"

"So he managed it for you. If Mrs. Wrighton could but know! Any more news? You are better than the morning paper!"

"That's not much of a compliment, for the morning paper is half Mr. Rhodes and the other half advertisements!<sup>1</sup> I met Starling yesterday, she said she had n't seen you for ages. She was going to hunt you up; but the Drawler and Silence Wright came to tea, so she could n't get away. I left her to it — they are neither of them friends of mine."

"I like Silence," said Margery, vaguely. "I meant to go round to Friedenhof this afternoon, but I don't think I shall."

<sup>1</sup> The Author declines to be responsible for any opinion expressed by the characters in this book.

"Why not?"

"It's so hot." ("I cannot go there — just now!" she thought.)

"Oh, nonsense. Do go! It will do you more good than moping here. By the way, Major Vibart is back — he came back last night, late."

"Did he?" said Margery, lightly. "Who told you? He ought to come and look me up to-day. It is ages since he called." She wondered at her own nerve.

"Perhaps he knows the Professor is away. He is a great stickler for etiquette, you know."

"Is he?" Margery said with a laugh that startled herself. "I don't suppose he is more so than other men, — and I fully expect to have visitors! Won't Mrs. Naseby gossip. What did you do last night?"

"Positively nothing. Life is as dull as ditchwater."

"Polly, we are getting awfully frivolous and demoralised. If we have one day without anything doing, we call it slow."

"Well, so it is. After all one must have amusements. I'm sure our little tennis parties and entertainments in general are innocent enough."

A sudden gravity wiped out Madge's dimples. "I wonder if they are!" she said. "When I first came out, I was carried away by the whirl of things in which I found myself, — tennis parties and gymkanas and dances and picnics. Now I take it all for granted; but I find it very dull if nobody comes and nothing happens. We all seem to live just for the things that are going to take place next week, but for nothing further ahead."

"We can only be young once. I said that to Beau Livingston the other night, and he said that his 'once' was pretty well over, he thought. I knew he wanted me to deny it, so I did n't."



"He seems to have a fair time of it, young or not! Have you seen much of him lately?"

"H'm — a fair quantity."

"I thought you said —"

"Yes, so I did. But he saw me home from the Hearn's the other night —"

"And —"

"Well, I have n't let him get any further for a long time."

"And that night he did?"

"It was only at the gate, and no one saw."

The old consolation! Madge had applied it to herself earlier in the morning. She wrinkled her smooth forehead. "It's the thin edge of the wedge," she thought rapidly. "But she knows that as well as I do, and I can't warn her from my own experience. And, after all, what's a kiss?"

"Well, you'll come to our tennis, won't you?" Polly said as she left.

"Of course. Whom have you asked?"

"Oh, Starling, and the Hearne girls, and Mrs. Naseby, and Major Yeats, and True, of course."

"Any one else?"

"One or two men to make up, — Beau Livingston, I dare say."

"After the finale at the gate. I see."

"And Major Vibart, — at least, I'll see that he has an invitation."

"Don't trouble yourself on my account. I am going to explore Major Yeats. He is new to me, and consequently interesting. I will cut Mrs. Drysdale out while she is still a slave to the measles!"

They parted, laughing, with the brave blue sky above and the sunshine blazing into their bright, careless faces. Polly jumped on her cycle and went zigzagging off among the firs to the back gate, which was her shortest way home, — "Having a gymkana, on her own

account," Madge said, — and Madge herself sauntered away down the garden among the little red roses and the white moonflowers. Her spirits fell again with Polly's departure ; some horror of memory seemed to hang about the garden and drove her indoors. She would not look at the vineyard, but went back to the drawing-room and began to practise. Unfortunately all the songs on the piano had been chosen for Vibart's benefit, and bore his preference upon them. "I do not feel as if I could ever face him in the day again," thought Madge, as she began to play the symphony of a ballad called "Lovelace." The words were Raffalowich's, and had been set for her long ago by a friend in England. Her thoughts ran on to Vibart, while her hands passed mechanically over the notes. "I wonder what he will do or say when we meet ! It is bound to be awkward for us both. He will try to say he is sorry, and then I shall want to kill him ! Oh, I won't see him for some time ; that will be best. I can easily avoid him, as he will probably be doing the same thing by me." She began to sing —

" ' Why do you come to-night, to-night,  
So many miles of wind and rain ? '  
' Oh, but I come with much delight  
To your warm, sheltering nest again ! '

" ' Why do you come to-night, to-night ?  
It might mean death to both of us ! '  
' Oh, but I come with much delight, —  
All things I love are dangerous. '

" ' Why do you come ? Do you forget  
Who broke my heart so long ago ? '  
' Oh, but since then my lips have met  
No sweetness like your saying, " No " ' "

The last line of the song drowned the opening of the door, but through the final chords she heard the servant say, " Majore Vibet ! " and started up from the piano as the door closed.

He came into the room smiling gaily, and as she rose, he caught her up in his arms and kissed her, murmuring two words in her ear before he set her down that brought the blood up over her face and neck. There was no consciousness of any awkward situation about him, as Madge had expected, and his unabashed confidence left her breathless. He smiled down upon her as if in triumph, while she stood before him rosy and tongue-tied.

"I have only a few minutes, little one, but I felt I must just have a glimpse of you!" he said. "I am due at the Camp now, and we have been out all the morning." She noticed in a bewildered fashion that he was in full uniform. The glitter of his spurs, and the various metals which ornamented his broad person, caught the light and seemed to jingle and dance before her eyes.

"Oh, Jack, how very splendid you are!" she gasped, half laughing. "I — did n't expect you in to-day!"

"No, and I am afraid I can't come to-night," he said, with an outspokenness from which Madge winced. "If I can, I will, of course. Leave the morning-room window open as long as possible, dear; and sit there, will you? But that was n't what I wanted to say. Look here, how long will your brother be away?"

"A fortnight at the outside."

"Well, I want you to come away with me for one night at least. You can manage that, can't you?"

She gasped. "Oh, no! No! — how could I?"

"You are clever enough, if you want to, I'll swear! Suppose we go to Hout's Bay?"

"It is so near! The next time I went I should be recognised. Besides I —"

"It won't matter; we need n't go together. Drive over in the afternoon and stay the night. I'll come down later, when there is no fear of excursionists."

"But I could n't go alone."

"Take one of your servants."

"How *could* I!"

"Well, perhaps it is risky." He paused to consider, but had not, as Madge hoped, abandoned his project. "I will supply you with a maid," he said, after a moment's thought. "She can meet you somewhere on the road. Only don't ask any questions."

"But afterwards?"

"She is going Home next Wednesday, worse luck! Otherwise we might have made use of her chaperonage again!" and he actually laughed.

"I suppose I can do it," Madge said slowly. "I can say I spent the night with the Villiers in Cape Town; they are also going Home on Wednesday."

"Capital! I said you could do it if you liked. You are such a bright little girl, Madge! When I first saw you I said to myself, 'That girl is not only the prettiest I have seen, — she has got brains.' What the French call 'Savoir faire,' and we cannot translate, because you so seldom find an English woman possessed of it."

Madge was pleased. Vibart's flattery always contrived to reach her weak points. She felt a sense of added importance, as if she were a woman of the world conducting an intrigue. The more vulgar forms of expressing it roused a sense of morality and consequent restrictions. She felt that she was entering into the spirit of the escapade, as she said, with a little smile: "Then I suppose I am not to recognise you even when you turn up at the Hotel?"

"Of course not. Very likely you'll have gone to bed before I arrive, but perhaps I shall appear in the dining-room for something to eat. I don't suppose there will be any one staying in the Hotel except ourselves at this time of the year."

"But how are we to speak to each other at all, then?"

"Don't you remember the balcony?" he said sig-



nificantly. "All the front rooms open out onto it. Don't let them put you at the back, that's all!"

"Oh, Jack, I ——"

She wished he had not been quite so skilful in surmounting difficulties. There seemed to be a devilish facility about it all. The only obstacle lay in the making the servants believe that she was going to Cape Town while she journeyed in the contrary direction, and she saw that this could be overcome by driving out to Hout's Bay along a somewhat circuitous route.

"I must be off!" Vibart said hurriedly. "Good-bye, dearest! That's all arranged then — Friday, at the Hotel! Of course I'll come round if I can before that, but they are working me like the devil just now, worse luck! Good-bye again —"

With her lips still tingling from his kiss, Madge watched him walk down the steps, take his horse from the Kaffir boy, and ride away in the sunshine. As soon as his overmastering vitality was removed from her, she looked back in dismay at what she had promised. She did not like to turn back — indeed she began to fear that even if she wrote to say she had changed her mind, the next personal interview would sweep her protests on one side again. Where were her resolutions of this morning? Where was her determination to never even run the risk of — She stood at the window looking blindly out at the sunny green garden, and warring with the thought that to everything that he had asked her, she had meant to say, No! — and that she had said, Yes!

## CHAPTER VIII

*"They call it Eden where those lovers met."*

THE way ran for some distance between the fir-trees, along a road where the pencilled shadows of the afternoon were lengthily drawn on the red dust. Through the dark stems of the trees, and over the plumbago hedges, was a glimpse of stripped vines, for here stretched the famous vineyards of Constantia. Beyond Constantia, the road began to rise, until it wound round the mountain and over Hout's Bay Nek.

Margery sat at the back of the Cape cart in silence, and hardly looking about her. The hood of the cart was up to keep off the sun when they came into the open, but even while they were still going through the firs she kept her sunshade up as an additional guard, and shrank if any one came in view. Once, as they turned aside from one road into another, she had an alarm, — two horses were coming along the road they had left, walking side by side through the fretted sun and shade, and the sound of voices and light laughter floated after Margery. Suppose it was some one who recognised her, and they were coming this way! She had not fully recognised that she ran any risk of detection until that moment. A hurried explanation of her presence there flashed through her mind — should she say this — or that? Either story was improbable, but in her desperation she must decide on something. She glanced at her equally silent companion, and wondered how she could best account for this respectable, comely woman sitting beside her! Then she became aware that the riders had continued their way, and were not following the cart, and with a sigh of relief she raised

her sunshade a little to look after them and see who they were. She recognised the slim dust-coloured figure of Miss Montfort, who always wore a holland skirt, and a minute later she saw that her companion was Valentine Cayley. Vague reports that she had heard of these two flashed back on her mind — had not some one said, “Cayley is running his head into a noose. Why the deuce does n’t he make a bolt of it, and get free of her! Thought he asked for work Up Country?” Though she did not know him personally, she felt vaguely sorry as her eyes followed the two figures. Miss Montfort’s reputation was even less lovely than Mrs. Cromo Dame’s, and V. C. was kindly spoken of by those who knew him. If she had realised her own connection with his fate, she might have been more sorry still, but after a minute she forgot the couple who had ridden on towards Wynberg, and looked again covertly at her spurious “maid.” The woman had said next to nothing; her manner was perfectly respectful, and she had taken the onus of the journey on herself with quiet capability, engaging the cart and looking after the slight baggage they had with them. Margery wondered who she was, and what she thought? But the last speculation was intolerable; she put it from her quickly, and looked at the material things round about.

They had left Constantia behind by now, and were driving more slowly, up an ascent between plantations of silver trees. On either side of the open road the whispering, frosted leaves shimmered whitely in the sunlight, or alternated in waves of silver light and greyish shadow as the wind passed over them. A mile or so more and the road was steeper, the ascent slower — they were nearing the Nek, and behind them lay a view before which Madge held her breath anew whenever she saw it, though she had been here before. In the distance were the blue sea and the white sand of

Muizenburg, but all the hollow land immediately beneath them was full of wood and vineyard and farmland, bounded by the soft green velvet of the mountainsides. It was as if she saw the Garden of Eden in a cup, held in the hand of God, and she looked upon it as upon the scene of the most vivid portion of her life, as yet. It was a little spot to have held so big a tragedy, for to her single existence, at any rate, the immediate past had been a thunderous thing, — a larger experience than she had ever before encountered, — and she vaguely recognised its tragic side, already. The nobility of great events is too large for comedy, even to the most elementary of human beings.

The cart paused on the crest of the Nek to breathe the horses. It was then that Madge looked back, sitting in silence beside her silent companion. After a few minutes the dark-skinned driver called to his rough ponies, and they went on again, down a winding road that took them rapidly below the summit and hid the east side of the Peninsula from their view. From this point until they reached the Hotel the scene was uncultivated Africa, rough grass and tall rank flowers, purple and flame-colour, and here and there a low desolate building with white walls and a zinc roof set down in the waste. Margery looked at it all and saw it not; her thoughts, by some freak of her brain, had flown to Vibart, and dwelt on him with a new yearning tenderness, unconscious that he was but a temporary image set up to fill the aching emptiness of a godless shrine. A faint trouble stirred in her, as the sap stirs in the young trees. For the first time, she was regretful of their indefinite relations, and her face flushed again at the memory of his two words in her ear after the night in the vineyard. What he had said was, "Little Wife!" Alas! Alas! In the background of her mind she saw a dream-home, with rosy children whose hair was as bright as his, and their eyes his eyes. Then



she blushed again as at her own presumption, and then again her new-found maternity rose up in self-defence. Was she not his wife by right of every desire and Nature? The passion of her love shook her, and swept her into a fervour as of religion, but the emotion which she felt, though she knew it not, was detachable from Vibart, who only served in reality as the image in the shrine. "We cannot go against Nature," she said to herself, reflecting his often-repeated creed. "It is, after all, the most holy thing, — far holier than mere forms and ceremonies and conventional restrictions. He is mine, and I am his. The sanctity of love ratifies all things."

The cart turned suddenly to the left, drove between coarse green fields, and stopped in an open space of sandy gravel before the Hotel. It was built at an irregular angle, one portion of the house branching off into the servants' quarters, and the other being a long solid block with a row of large trees planted close against the stoep so that the branches overshadowed the broad wooden balcony above. All the front rooms overlooked this balcony by long windows which opened onto it, so that the occupants used it as a mode of entrance and egress more than the doors, and descended onto the stoep, and in and out of the Hotel by the flight of wooden steps at the corner of the angle. Margery got down from the cart and stood looking round her with a curious insensibility, as of one who walks in their sleep. She heard her companion speak to the driver as she paid him, and then go before her and arrange about rooms. "My young lady would prefer a bedroom facing this way, if you please," she said quietly. Margery thought what a pleasant, well-trained voice and manner she had. "And my own room to be behind it — on the other side of the passage? Yes, thank you, that will do very well. Shall I take your bag up, Miss? Perhaps you would like to look at the rooms."

"Thank you!" said Margery, and followed her in the same sleep-walking fashion.

The rooms were airy and fresh; and Margery saw her bag unstrapped and unpacked by skilful hands, and then the woman asked if she should tell the people at the Hotel to send her up some tea. "There are rather a noisy set of excursionists here sometimes, Miss," she said. "Perhaps you might not care for the dining-room!"

Margery accepted the hint. "No," she said. "I would rather have it here. Please have yours upstairs too, if you would prefer it."

"Thank you, Miss. Is there anything more you want?"

"Nothing, thank you." The woman had reached the door when she spoke again with an effort, and in a lower tone. "What am I to call you?"

"My name is Caroline, Miss!" The words came after a slight pause.

"Thank you, Caroline. Do you know my name?"

"No, Miss? I thought—it was Mortimer!"

John *Mortimer* Vibart! Margery turned her face to the open window and the tree-locked balcony beyond, and breathed with a sense of difficulty.

"Is that the name you have given here?" she said.

"Yes, Miss!"

"Then that is quite right."

She heard the door shut behind her, but she did not move. She leaned against the window frame clenching her hands and afraid that she was going off into hysterical laughter. She thought afterwards that it must have been quite five or ten minutes before a sense of self-mastery came over her, and with a sigh she stepped out of the window onto the balcony, and sat down on one of the old basket chairs which stood out there in all weathers. A Kaffir girl brought her her tea there, and she drank it, looking and listening, in the same

mechanical fashion, to the sights and sounds of the Hotel. A pleasure-party had been there to lunch, and had spent the afternoon on the beach; between the branches of the trees she looked down on the carts which had brought them, and saw the horses put in again, and the tourists assembling. Two men stood in the sand beyond the stoep, talking; their voices rose clearly to the balcony where she sat. "It is very hot," said one, "as warm as we had it in February."

"Yes," said the other, "but I think the summer is about over. We shall have rain next week."

Madge looked up at the speckless blue sky, and wondered. The mountain-side rose sheer behind the Hotel and shut it in, but in the front, where she was sitting, the view went over rough fields and stony road to a distant prospect of tree-tops. Beyond this lay the Bay and the white sand, but they could not be seen. Through the distance, however, the intermittent sound of the sea came up on the afternoon stillness, as if some mighty thing breathed in its sleep.

By and by the carts drove away, the pleasure-seekers laughing and talking and waving handkerchiefs. The wheels died out on the sandy road, and a quiet hush fell over everything as the sun went down, filling the clefts of the mountains with brown shadows and fiery red lights from his deathbed. There was nothing animated or active in all the scene, but the white figure of the girl on the broad wooden balcony was the quietest thing there. Her thoughts went out and lost themselves in distance, travelling over the infinite miles which lay around her, until the realisation that she was momentarily alone in a great Continent gave her a sense of fright, — the lost, desolate feeling of those who, accustomed to living in a small country, find themselves in a big one. England looked a dot in the sea to her imagination; there was something limited in its very views. She went back in memory, and saw the country

always bounded by little low hills and warm wooded slopes that shut her in. It was safe and small, as her own life had been. Here, in Africa, there was infinite room to stray—and she had strayed. She had lost her sense of boundaries, and for the first time the impression of being in a savage, alien land struck down upon her as if it came from the granite mountains. The ragged pasture-land opposite, — two horses and a mule were grazing scantily there, — and the stunted wilderness that lay round the Hotel, suggested uncivilised Nature. What must it be like Up Country, if even here, within twenty or thirty miles of Cape Town, the land looked like an unfinished draft of a world !

Suddenly it grew dark, for there is no twilight there after the sun is down. The shadow of the mountains wrapped the Hotel in intense loneliness ; the patter of a dog's feet on the stoep, and some one giving an order, became startlingly distinct. Margery rose with a shrinking glance at the rustling branches of the trees which were growing black with the coming night, and went into her bedroom. It was but a step through the open window, — how easy an entrance from the balcony ! She lit a candle and brushed her hair, still with that curious sense of unreality, which even seemed to hush her footfall down the long passage with its blank rows of doors on either side. Doors ! — what might not lie behind them ? She paused at the head of the stairs and looked back at them fascinated. One opened, and the quiet, tangible figure of Caroline came out into the passage, following her.

“Will you have dinner now, Miss ?” said the well-trained voice, “it is getting on for seven.”

“Yes, please. I think you had better come down and have something to eat with me, Caroline. Is there any one else in the Hotel ?”

“Thank you, Miss. No, I don't think there are any other visitors.”



Her surmise proved correct ; the long gaunt dining-room was empty. It looked like a great lecture hall with its enormous uncurtained windows, and bare floor. "The sort of place where we should give school-feasts and charity dinners at Home !" thought Madge, as she walked across to one of the little tables in the window. The blinds were down ; but she knew, for she had seen the room by daylight, that if she could have looked out she would have seen the loose stones and rubble of the mountain lying outside, and the steep ascent rising immediately beyond. There were only two of the chandeliers alight ; the further end of the room was in shadow, and a single waiter appeared in answer to their summons. It was infinitely deserted.

Margery and Caroline faced each other on either side of the narrow white cloth. Now and then Margery glanced at the self-contained face opposite her, and speculated as to the woman's age, her circumstances, and her thoughts. But her scrutiny told her nothing. They exchanged half-a-dozen remarks, but the sound of their voices in the empty space was startling, and they instinctively spoke under their breath, which gave an added impression of stealthiness. As Margery was finishing her meal, she heard voices in the Hotel entrance, though she had missed the sound of wheels, which were probably muffled in the soft sand, and a minute afterwards another visitor entered and sat down on the other side of the room. Margery lowered her eyes, and played with the stem of her wine-glass, trying to think of some commonplace remark to make to her companion, while her ears were painfully conscious of every tone of Vibart's voice as he ordered his dinner. She finished her own with difficulty, and pushing away her plate, said something to Caroline about going to her room.

"I will see that it is all ready for you, Miss," returned the woman, with the same perfection of respect, and preceded her.

Margery did not glance towards the other visitor as she left the dining-room. She went up to the balcony again, and leaned on the railing round it, and when Caroline came and told her that her room was all ready for the night, dismissed her, and said she wanted nothing more.

She heard the clock strike eight and then half past, while she still leaned on the balcony in the darkness. A half moon came up slowly, and made the world a ghostly place, and the awful insistence of the stony mountains was as full of expression as the Sphinx. It sank into Margery's soul until she was permeated with the vast immutability, and stood there as if herself petrified. She did not want to move or speak; when a heavy tread sounded on the wooden stair, she stirred impatiently, but did not turn her head. Vibart came along the balcony cautiously and stopped beside her.

"Well, so you got here all right!"

The eager commonplace brought her back from the abstracted mood stealing over her to present things. With a half sigh she yielded to the arm round her waist, and leaned her head back against his shoulder.

"Jack, what a vast country this is!"

"Large enough. I rode over, — you drove, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"What time did you get here?"

"About five or half past. I sat here for ages, — a hundred years I think, — and watched the mountains."

"It was awfully good of you to come! I hope you weren't very bored. I didn't dare to come down before. Margery, my darling, I can never thank you for this!"

She tried to reach the warm human atmosphere, and escape the influence of the inexpressible mountains and elementary earth; but she felt as if she touched him through a veil. Something had swept her away,

from mere vitality ; she was alive in the spirit, as well as in the body, and it separated them. She could only be passive, and let him satisfy himself with caresses, for she felt she could not help him.

"You know I would n't harm you in the least," he kept on saying, as if he were almost uneasy. "I knew I should n't do you any harm, or I would n't have asked you to come. You trust me, don't you, Madge?"

"Of course, dear." She wondered that he troubled himself on the matter, when she, for the moment, was so utterly calm. The doubts and fears had formerly been hers, and it had been Vibart who had smoothed them away.

"And you love me?"

"Ar' n't you tired of the assurance yet?"

"No! — Madge, do you know I'm fonder of you than of any other woman who has been in my life?"

"I am glad of that." She did not disturb herself for the suggestion of there being other women, though she knew that they were probably many. She had imbibed his tenet that a man must have many loves.

"I was n't nearly so fond of you at first, you know!" he acknowledged with a little laugh. "Are you cross?"

"Not a bit! — I don't care any more than you do!"

"If you care as much as that, it's a precious big deal! I can't bear the thought of leaving you — it's an awful fag having to go Home just now."

The crickets were singing loudly in the dust and the grass clumps, on the mountain head a sullen red glare proclaimed a bush fire, and the sea's voice was fitfully audible through the night. Madge looked at the bush fire and the cold white moonlight, with all the pleasure of an art-lover in a harmonious contrast. She felt as though, while her lips talked to Vibart, her soul talked somehow to the mountains.

"But we always knew you would have to go some day, Jack. And we have been very happy!"

"Have I made you happy, darling? Say that again, won't you! You don't know how I hate to think of going away."

"You might come back again!" said Margery, dreamily. She was half remorseful that she felt no sharper pang of pain at the mention of his going. Did she not care? Of course she cared — it was only that she did not realise it! why, — she loved him! It was the great passion of her life, — the love that sanctified all things. She forced it on her mind as if by repetition she could prove its reality.

"I am afraid it's not likely, unless there were a war," he said, sending a mouthful of smoke out into the night that caught the moonlight and gleamed whitely. He was smoking a cigar, and Margery sniffed the scent appreciatively. "No, we are more likely to meet in England. You are sure to come Home some day!"

"Not at all sure, with Anthony. He cannot live in England in the winter, so through some oblique process of reasoning he thinks it unnecessary to come Home in the summer! Apropos of nothing, Jack, I met that Mr. Cayley who is in your Regiment on my way here this afternoon."

"Did he see you?"

"No, he was riding with Miss Montfort, and they turned aside and went by another road before they passed me."

"V. C. seems to be going far and fast in that direction," said Vibart, in an amused tone. He seemed perfectly satisfied to know it.

"Yes, it is rather a pity, isn't it?"

"Why?"

"She is reported something of an adventuress; but she is a friend of the Cromo Dames, so people are obliged to accept her. Do you know, I was very jealous of Mrs. Cromo Dame once? I don't know that I am not still!"



"She is a handsome woman, — but you need n't trouble your head about her."

"Need n't I? Are you ever jealous?"

"Awfully! — I should like to shoot all those boys and old Johnnies that Livingston insists made love to you at Home!"

"Mr. Livingston talks nonsense — and sometimes stumbles over the truth. But my love-affairs were very harmless. I used to write to three boys, and one old man asked me to marry him. That's all!"

"Except for the details!"

"Well, I'm sure you need n't talk! Think of the details there must be in your own past!"

"I never kissed an old lady anyhow!"

"You don't know that I —"

"Well?"

"Jack, I do think you are horrid! — and you said you were n't jealous!"

Vibart's suppressed laugh almost startled her. "I'm not — not over your poor little sins in the past, anyhow! I might not be so easy ten years hence. You'll do a lot in ten years, Madge!"

"Do you think I shall?" asked Margery, in real amusement. "I wonder!"

They were silent again, while the mountains slowly reasserted their ascendancy over Margery, until a clock striking ten roused her. "I must go to bed!" she said. "I'm afraid of being seen or heard talking to you." She hesitated awkwardly. "Good-night, Jack!" she said softly.

"Look here, I'm going down to get a drink," he said, as he kissed her. "I don't want to be late, myself. Madge!" — he bent his head in the darkness and whispered — "Lock your door, and leave your window unfastened!"

She buried her face on his breast for an instant, then turning away went into her room.

Vibart went down the steps again ; she heard his descending foot as she undressed and got into bed. Through habit, she knelt down beside the bed in her night-gown, and clasped her hands. No words came to her lips, and, with a shudder of fear, she rose up again without praying. For a moment she thought, "I can pray afterwards, and ask to be forgiven !" then, with a revulsion of feeling, she thrust the thought away. "At least I will be honest," she said. "If I am wicked, I won't try and cheat God by saying I did n't mean to be ! I don't think it is wicked. It's Nature — you can't go against Nature." Vibart's creed again.

She had left one side of the window open, and the blind was up. As she lay in bed, she could see the night sky over the tree-tops, and hear the crickets sing. The forceful impression of the mountains representing Africa came back upon her, and she fell into another trance under the influence of their nearness. The long implacable stony range seemed always present in her mind,—an insistent declaration of unalterable character. The very barrenness of the hard outlines against the empty sky accentuated it. It was immovable, eternal, filled with audible silence and a vast sense of space, and this also was a type of the strength of Nature. . . . The moonlit sky was blotted out from her eyes by a dark figure. As it had filled the pale opening of the vine arbour on the night when she had first met him there, so it seemed again to fill the horizon. A hand pushed back the window a little further, and Vibart stepped into the room. . . .

## CHAPTER IX

*" Will she cling to me as kindly,  
When the childish love is lost ?  
Will she pray for me as blindly,  
Or but weigh the wish and cost*

*Looking back on our lost Eden from the girlhood she has crossed ?*

MRS. WRIGHTON'S tennis afternoon came off at the end of the following week. It was very largely attended, mainly through curiosity, for the invalid widow had not entertained within the memory of the present three-years' generation of the Social World. Three years is a fair average for that society, partly because people rarely stay longer without going Home, partly because that is the usual limit for the Gun-boats and the Regiments to remain before they are moved on to the next station. Mrs. Wrighton's incentive towards the mild dissipation of tea and tennis had blown as lightly across the suburbs as the gold-dust on the petals of the Narina, and Wynberg and Rondebosch went to laugh at Dr. Langdon's strategic diversion in the monotony of attending her fancied ailments. Polly Harbord was really the mainspring of the entertainment; she poured out the tea, and worked the affair, while Mrs. Wrighton sat in a reclining chair, wrapped in a silken shawl, and said she felt the undertaking very much after her reclusive habits.

"This is a capital advertisement for Miss Harbord's capabilities as a hostess!" said Mrs. Naseby, in her small sharp-edged voice. She happened to speak to Madge, who remembered Starling's simile of the vinegar bottle with the stopper left out, and smiled involuntarily.

"Yes, she does it capitally!" she agreed with intentional amiability.

"Poor girl! how unfortunate she has always been over her lovers! They have always fallen off. I am sure I can't think why, for she would make a very capable wife, I am sure. I wish some steady, nice man would take a fancy to her!"

"Oh, well, there's hope for us yet, Mrs. Naseby!" said Madge, with a flash of demure mischief in her eyes. "Perhaps we may get a few more chances before we have done!" She looked across at Polly, pink-flushed and daintily dressed, laughing over the tea-things with Major Yeats.

"With you, of course, my dear!" said Mrs. Naseby, suavely. "You are quite a young girl. But with Polly Harbord! — I don't know. Her fifth season, you know!"

"Really?" Madge was getting bored with the pin-pricks of gossip. What did it all matter, even to this narrow, spiteful woman! Were there not larger interests of social life in which even she could interest herself?

"Yes, really, quite five! Oh, I remember her first appearance here! I'm telling you the strict truth, my dear. Most people think she looks so young that they discredit it, but it's a fact. Odd that she has n't married, is n't it? And a girl has so many chances out here. But she has been unfortunate. I really did think she had caught young Leighton; she tries too obviously, I think sometimes. It puts the men off. I could tell you of a similar case not a hundred miles away! The girl literally ran the man into a corner, and he was so disgusted he went off after all and left her lamenting."

("I must get rid of this woman," thought Madge, wearily. "The taste she leaves in my mouth is too entirely evil.") "I see the Dodds are back," she remarked.



"Yes, they came home last night. Mr. Dodd looks well, doesn't he? They have been up to Johannesburg; he has large interests there. Last year was a terrible time for him, what with the Raid and the dynamite explosion, and all. You know, of course, how he made his money?"

"No," said Madge, carelessly, nodding to Starling across a crowd of mutual acquaintances. "I don't care either. In concerns me much more how he spends it!"

"Yes, of course, they entertain largely. He secures a certain popularity in that way, and gets people to go to his house, and so they shut their eyes to the Kimberley connection, and always speak of him as a Johannesburg man. He did go there afterwards, and so the original story was forgotten. Still one really wonders if it is true! I. D. B., you know!"

"Excuse me, but Mrs. Dodd is beckoning to me!"

Madge made her escape, gasping. A few minutes more would probably have seen the destruction of half the reputations and characters of the people there, and she was wise in her generation and preferred to know only their pleasant side. Starling and Mrs. Dodd greeted her warmly, and Johnnie himself came up to her, puffing out his greeting like a full breeze out for a holiday.

"You're looking pale, Miss Madge!" he said. "You ought to have come away with us. If I'd known that the Professor was off to the City of Saints, I'd have taken you, whether he liked it or not!"

"He never told me until the Friday," said Madge. "And he left on the Monday. I don't even know when he will be back. He has been away nearly a fortnight, but I have had no intimation of his return! How did you enjoy your trip?"

"Oh, splendid! Always like John'isburg. I'm on my own ground there, you know. But it's not so nice for a residence as this part. It's rough."

"I thought they prided themselves on the gaiety of their society!"

"Poor devils, they 're not very gay now! Last year put a damper on them that they 'll take a while to recover. They may perk up over the Jubilee. They are pretty gay as a rule, I admit — well, it is n't like this, you know. It may be gay, but it's a bit rowdy!" said Mr. Johnnie, with an explosion of laughter like the bursting of a paper bag. "All money, you know, — no manners! Unless you know the professional class. They 're quieter. But the leaders of society there are the people with the biggest pile, and the women think more of choosing their gowns from Paris, than of choosing their language. Fact! You can't take your wife to the public balls and be sure she won't see something rather lively. I took Mrs. Johnnie once or twice, because she wanted to see. Woman's curiosity, you know!"

"But what happened?"

"Oh, well, one of our leading ladies got up and insulted another, that's all. She would n't dance in the same set of lancers, so the first woman made personal remarks — recommended her to keep her hands clean!"

"Mr. Johnnie!"

"Fact. We thought there was going to be a jolly big fight!" He gave another paper-bag explosion. "The men separated them. Mrs. Johnnie did n't want to see many balls after that. Starling's never been to one. She was a flapper when we left John'sburg, and only came out to this part of the Colony."

Mrs. Dodd turned round at this point, and asked where Mrs. Drysdale was.

"Eric had the measles," said Margery. "And the baby, too. I have n't seen Mrs. Drysdale for weeks. They are both better, but she does n't go about yet."

"Why, you must have been quite stranded for com-

pany!" said Mrs. Johnnie, in her motherly way. "Whatever did you do with yourself?"

Margery put her hand to the soft laces at her throat with an instinctive gesture. "I — saw Polly sometimes!" she said with an odd little laugh. "And True."

"Ah, True is always the boy for looking after distressed damsels!" returned Mrs. Johnnie, smiling. "I'm glad you saw True. Well, Mr. Livingston, and how are you?"

"Glad to see you back, Mrs. Johnnie! Well, what's the news? Hulloo, Dodd! Been having any fresh fights with railway guards? You pugnacious savage! What's the news on the Rand? Has Kruger got another turn on the screw yet?"

"'Confound his politics'!" quoted Mr. Johnnie, cheerily. "Last year was a series of disasters, and he is trading on them! The only hope is, he will go too far."

"Never mind, it must come to war sooner or later, and then every one will get a chance," said Livingston, airily. "Promotion is slow in the Duke's. Forrester says that they daily offer up prayers for the continuation of the Transvaal aggravation. Jack Vibart is going Home, by the way."

"Yes, so we hear. When does he sail?"

"Some time in June. Miss Cunningham, where have you been? I have been playing tennis, and wanted you for my partner. There is luck in our union. I played with you on your first appearance, you know!"

"I remember, — but we lost." A curious, wondering look fell into her eyes. The slits of blue between the lashes widened into the perfect iris with the pupils dilated. "Three months ago! This is about the last tennis we shall have, they say."

"Oh, the summer is over. Those rains at the be-

ginning of the week told us that. You were talking to Mrs. Naseby just now. Dear, kind-hearted soul! What did she say of me?"

"We did not get to you — I fled!"

"What a pity! I always enjoy the reports of her criticisms so much. Last week she told Drysdale that I was in financial difficulties, and I am always glad to know these things, because one should provide for the winter. What was she desecrating this time?"

"Polly's character as hostess."

"That is rather choice! — because Miss Harbord is known of old to be unassailable therein. What did Mrs. Naseby say?"

"She said that she was telling me the absolute truth. I do dislike people who tell me the truth, don't you?"

"Certainly! In fact I have always thought the best thing to do with the truth was to suppress it. Facts are so ill-bred."

"And so inartistic! — Talk of an angel! Here comes Mrs. Naseby herself, bearing down on us after the fashion of a full-blown battle-ship. Can we escape?"

They could not, for the lady in question came to anchor beside them at once. "Well, Mr. Livingston," she said, "I saw you in Cape Town yesterday!"

"I am often seen," said Beau, serenely. "It is a habit of which I have never been able to break myself."

"Perhaps, too, in this case you would wish to! You were with a lady!"

"Ah, who was it?"

"No one I know, — no one I have ever seen about here, — a handsome woman in red." She looked expectantly at Beau, who lifted his hat in a particularly charming manner to some one in the distance while she spoke.

"And so," he said pleasantly, meeting her attentive eyes with the frankest smile, "you saw me in Cape Town, — with a lady whom you did n't know — in



red." He looked at her still for a moment, his brilliant blue eyes a little wider than usual. "How fast!" he said, as though the criticism were forced from him. Then he turned aside and shook hands with a passing acquaintance.

"What does he mean?" Mrs. Naseby said in angry helplessness to Madge. "I certainly saw him, and he was with a woman who might have been — anybody."

"She probably was!" retorted Madge. "It is an inclusive word. I do not know what Mr. Livingston meant. Personally, I never see my acquaintances unless I feel happy in the conviction that they see me."

"He has a very questionable character for that sort of thing!" said Mrs. Naseby, with subdued eagerness. "You may not know it, — I dare say a young girl like you would not, — but I should not be too intimate with him if I were you. The Strattons had to send away their nurse on his account. Such a nice-mannered, satisfactory woman, too! But she got mixed up with Mr. Livingston, and of course they could not keep her. I hear she sailed for England last week, but goodness knows where she has been since she left them! — perhaps Mr. Livingston does, though. Of course I am only telling you this because, being without an older woman as you are, it is kinder to put you on your guard!"

"Of course," said Margery, in an untranslatable tone, "but don't you think that, as I am not supposed to know of these things about my acquaintances (and I really did not!), being, as you say, only a girl, that it would be better to leave my ignorance to protect me?" As she spoke, her eyes lit suddenly on Vibart, who was approaching her; for a moment she paused with a sense of horrible degradation, — a shock, as if she faced her own self. "Excuse me — there is Major Vibart!" she said. "I want to ask him if he has seen Mrs. Dodd!" And she went to meet him.

"Well, ma mie, how are you!" he said, as he took her hand and squeezed it. Vibart was a man who never let any opportunity slip of expressing his physical emotion towards a woman. Affectionate demonstrations came so easily to him that they hardly meant anything more than a more restricted nature's simple greeting. He was always gay, and charming, and debonair, whatever undercurrent might be passing between himself and one of the opposite sex. Indeed, Forrester had once made a statement that became a tradition, to the effect that the Tracker had held Mrs. Cromo Dame's hand while he kissed Miss Montford in fancy, and touched Polly Harbord's foot with his own, — all the while he talked politics with Johnnie Dodd! It was known as the three-card trick in the Duke's.

"I am all right," said Margery, absently. Her thoughts were puzzling round a fragment of Mrs. Naseby's scandal. "The Strattons had to send away their nurse. Such a nice-mannered woman too! She left for England last week." Now the Strattons were Rondebosch people, and Madge only knew them slightly. She had never visited at their house, and knew neither their children or their nurse by sight, but a suspicion arose in her mind as to the identity of the dismissed woman who had gone back to England, and — Caroline!

"I am coming round to-night," Vibart whispered, as they strolled towards the tennis courts. "I haven't seen you for three days to speak to properly, my love, and I'm starving!" He glanced down at her sentimentally, and his tone lowered and softened with the facile alteration in which he was a past master.

Margery came back from her speculation with a start. She did not answer either his words or his eyes for a second, and then forced herself to a dutiful upward glance, wrestling with her own dismayed consciousness that she wished he had not said he was coming, — that she did not look forward to the meet-

ing ! It was not the first time that a horrible conviction had dawned upon her, that at times she would rather have been alone than have continued those secret meetings. And yet she did continue them, and had done so ever since her excursion to Hout's Bay. With docile endurance she did whatever he asked her, to the best of her ability, but the risks she ran of detection, and the constant strain and excitement of her life, made her feel dragged and tired. She wished he had not mentioned one of those assignments ; it seemed to her that they never met but what he referred in some way to the relations between them. Furthermore, it was becoming every day a greater dread in her mind that it was only endurance on her part ; she got no pleasure from it, but she clung desperately to the devoting herself entirely to his wishes, the more she felt that it wearied her. She shrank horrified from her own satiety. True love knew no such phase, and she had cosseted and petted the thought that her passion for Vibart was as sacred as a religion, until her whole self-esteem relied upon it. For if this were not the one great passion of her life, whose unique influence on her excused all sacrifices to it, *then what was she ?* She dared not face the thought, and denied her own growing indifference. She could not recognise the natural physical reaction from her former warmth, because she had never acknowledged that her feeling for Vibart was physical at all. Even his teaching had not brought her as far as that at present. With men, she acknowledged, the material side of things might always be paramount, but with women it was not so, — especially not so in her own case. By and by, when she was forced to recognise a certain truth in his platitudes, the glib creed he taught might discover that it had taken root in her mind, and then it would bear fruit.

Vibart inculcated his own beliefs and experiences, and destroyed her illusions, half unconsciously. It was

the inevitable influence of the more developed character upon the less, and he came as undesignedly to a mental possession of her as he had to a physical. No man is a deliberate villain. The consequences of a deviation from law and order are too obvious, and too probably unpleasant. Vibart meant Margery Cunningham no actual harm when he first began to pursue her acquaintance; he liked the sensual emotion which the intercourse with her provoked, and beyond that he was as indefinite in intention as Madge herself. He let things drift, and would "just see," as she had done. As he grew to know her more intimately, his attraction increased, for Madge was a lovable little person, and her freshness, and the satisfaction of feeling certain that he was the first in her experience, was inevitably fascinating to a man of Vibart's stamp. As his passion grew, his tardy qualms of conscience vanished. He spoke the truth when he said at the *Beatrice* dance that he wished them to be "all in all" to each other, and that his words implied an illicit love, he did not by that time care. He would, if he could, have married the girl; she appealed, in the first place, to his senses, but he had the wit to see that she had more lasting powers of attraction than mere flesh and blood. He was an affectionate fellow at bottom; it was generally through his easily moved feelings that he was entangled with one woman or another. With Madge for his wife, he would have been very happy in his home life, the absence of which he really felt, though he never for an instant deceived himself in thinking that he would be faithful to her. "It is out of all reason for a man and woman to stick solely to each other," he argued. "No married couple ever did it and lived contentedly together. I am the first with Madge, but I shall not be the last, — if she marries, her husband won't be that. I have only shown her what she must inevitably learn, and widened her experience. She was unformed, but she had infinite capabilities. She will be twice as



alluring now." He preached this doctrine by degrees to Madge, during their intercourse, which had been more intermittent than he intended, owing to official causes.

The death of the Duke's Colonel, and the delay in appointing a successor, had thrown additional work onto his shoulders, and put a restraint upon many of his private pursuits. It often happened that he received news to change his plans at a minute's notice, and communicated the same to Madge in a few words, uttered under his breath, when they met in social highways and byways, so that she had always to hold herself ready, and arrange her own engagements to suit his, as far as was possible. She almost dreaded meeting him at her friends' houses, for this reason, — she allowed so much to herself, but explained it under the plea that the uncertainty made concealment of their intercourse doubly difficult. She was, to her own horror, becoming a skilful prevaricator, and sometimes she feared that her friends detected it. In the present instance, there was an awkward factor in the situation.

"Polly is coming round to have dinner with me, after she has got Mrs. Wrighton to bed again, — she is sure to collapse after this!" she said. "What shall I do, Jack? Will you come later?"

"Get rid of her after dinner. It's a pity to lose an opportunity while your brother is away. I can get off to-night, and I do want to have a talk with you, pretty one! When will Cunningham be back?"

"I don't know, he has n't written. Don't come till ten, Jack. Polly stays so long talking!"

"All right. I can smoke in the arbour until I hear her go."

"It's a good thing that Kaffir servants don't chatter like white ones!" remarked Margery, with an inward shrug at herself. "As far as using their intelligence goes to make mischief, one treats them very much as

though they were dumb animals, and could n't speak ! And yet, even though I do not believe they understand much that is not said absolutely to them, they must have grasped the situation sufficiently to think — something."

She turned with irrepressible relief to Captain Barton, and they all stood beyond the wire netting, chatting, until Vibart was called away to play tennis.

He rarely lingered long at Madge's side in public, as he had done before their greater intimacy ; but sometimes it became a question in her mind whether this very carefulness was not marked and understood by a Society by no means ignorant of such manœuvres. Even while she chatted gaily with Barton, the same speculation crossed her mind, and she met his fine shallow eyes and wondered what opinion of her lay behind their surface friendliness. He began telling her a joke relating to a mutual acquaintance, as only an Irishman can, and their united laughter brought Beaumont Livingston into their neighbourhood.

"What are you laughing at?" he said. "I have to hear people enjoying themselves when I'm not in it. Miss Cunningham, Mrs. Dodd says she wants to go home and take you with her, and I have told her that people ought not to have what they want, it is so bad for them,—particularly when it is chocolate almonds. Did you see Barton clear the plate of them, by the way? Don't deny it, Barton, because I can bring three untrustworthy witnesses to prove it. Miss Cunningham, surely you are not going to be immoral enough to indulge Mrs. Dodd, and leave?"

"I really ought to begin saying good-bye, at any rate," said Madge. "There are such a lot of people here that I know, that I am sure I can't say where or when I shall end!"

"If we should see the end we should never make the beginning!" said Livingston, lightly. "The veil

which shrouds the future shows the craftiness of a Providence which does not wish the world to stand still. *You* will end with Mrs. Naseby, who will poison your last moments at this festive gathering by a re-chauffé of all our backslidings, past, present, and to come?"

"I hope not indeed! It is just what I wish to avoid."

She spoke with a little shrug of distaste, for Mrs. Naseby's opinions of her fellow-creatures had been formed out of the refuse of many London seasons, and a short sojourn among the converted Natives of a corner of Pongo-land, whither her husband's malignant star had led him. For if heathens could be so depraved after a little teaching, to what depths must not a civilised and Christian community have slipped? — as exemplified by her own experience.

The Professor returned to Wynberg at the end of the month, with a cold and three new Coleoptera. He came suddenly, as sorrows come, and Madge forbore to ask how he had enjoyed his holiday, on account of his obvious sense of injury in his present misfortune. She preferred to judge from his protracted stay, and abuse of everything in and about Wynberg, and was thankful that the few hours' notice he gave her of his arrival was sufficient to find everything in readiness for him. As he came in from the stoep from the early dark of a May evening, and she met him in the hall, she was surprised to see him with new eyes, as a peevish, elderly man, ill-tempered and selfish, but an unimportant object for fear. Had she ever dreaded him? Had she out-grown her fear during his absence? In what material way had their relations to each other so far altered, that she took and gave greeting composedly, and knew that, beyond grumbling at existence in general, he would find no fault. She could not tell, but was conscious of a subtle alteration in herself or

her circumstances, which was but beginning. Her new-found strength gave her the nerve to face, as she had never dared to do, his possible discovery of the situation between her and Vibart, and to plan and guard against it.

The new Colonel arrived to take over the command of the Duke's at the end of May, and Vibart left a fortnight later. During his last week in Wynberg, all Madge's energies were taxed to contrive their intercourse, to manage the household of Vine Lodge so that it should run smoothly, and to nurse her brother, whose cold had developed sufficient virulence to drive him to bed. He objected to his sister remaining in the room with him; but his habit of ringing his bell whenever he lacked distraction, or thought she might be busy elsewhere, kept her mind on the stretch. He was still confined to his room when Vibart came to say good-bye, before proceeding to Cape Town where he embarked.

It was a wet morning the first of the really broken Winter weather; the blinds were all up in the drawing-room, which looked cold and chill without its accustomed sunshine, in spite of the fire which Madge had had lighted. She stood opposite to him on the hearth rug, looking down into the glowing coals. Outside she could hear the rain licking against the house and thundering on the zinc roofing of the stoep with the rattle of big drums. Now and then a great gust of wind lifted it in streaming lines and drove it through the fir-trees. The mountains were blotted out, and the sky leaned low over the earth, heavy with moisture, and with a bosom full of water. After their first kiss, Margery and Vibart had stood silent, as if by tacit consent, facing each other, as if some reflection of their coming estrangement had touched them already.

"It might be almost England, with the fire and the rain!" Margery said at last.

"Yes. — Madge, will you —"



She knew from the increasing fulness of his tone that he was going to ask some useless pledge of her, and stirred with instinctive protest. Would she remember?—yes, if she could not forget. Would she care still?—yes, she supposed so. It seemed inevitable. Had she wanted to weight her life with love for him?

“Jack, don’t!” she said softly. “It is no use talking. We have nothing to say. We must just wait and—see.”

“You’ll write to me, darling?”

“Yes—I suppose so.”

“Only suppose so, Madge!”

“Oh, how can one tell!” she exclaimed in real quick pain at last. “How long do human emotions last? You have told me so often, yourself, that they never do! It must be all in all for the time being—that is the best one can hope for! It must go, later. Well, I’ve given you—everything!”

“Yes, I know. You’ve been an angel, and I’m utterly grateful. I love you more than any woman in the world, Madge, and I believe I always shall.” He drew her into his arms and began to pet her. “Listen, Sweet! Your brother has some idea of coming Home, either this year or next—he told me so himself, and you can guess I fostered the idea. Then we’ll meet in Town and be together again.”

“Yes!” She tried to think that the hope was all that kept her calm, and could have torn herself for her own lack of feeling. “We’ll have that to look forward to, Jack.”

He laid his face down against hers, and they stood so for a moment without speaking.

“There is Anthony’s bell!” Madge said suddenly. She pushed him from her, and gave a queer little cough as if to clear the catch in her breath. “Good-bye. I hope you won’t get very wet driving to the Station—

what a fearful day it is ! It *can* rain here ! Nature is crying over your departure."

"I'll telegraph when we start," he said, still holding her as if loth at the last to loose his arms. "Look out for it, or it might fall into your brother's hands. Good-bye, my own darling —"

She meant to part without a further word, but at the last some impulse made her clasp her hands behind his handsome head and whisper, "Don't quite forget me, Jack !" She did not hear his answer.

The Professor's bell was ringing very angrily indeed as she ran upstairs, without waiting to see Vibart leave the house. She heard the hall door shut, but could not look out of the window after the Cape cart which took him to the Station through the blurr of the rain, for attending to the Professor's exacting demands.

"Where have you been? What on earth have you been doing?" he burst forth as soon as she entered the room. "I've rung a dozen times, and no one answers ! I might die in my bed, and you would n't attend, I suppose. I want my medicine — it's past the time for it now, and I don't know if I ought to take it !"

"I have only kept you waiting a few minutes, and it won't hurt you at all to take it," said Madge, calmly. "There was some one here, and I could n't come on the instant."

The Professor grunted and lay down again, glaring helplessly. But Margery had her back to him, as she selected the necessary one from a forest of bottles, and it had no effect on her.

"Who was it?" he said viciously. "It's just like you to neglect me for any chance idiot who calls to gossip with you ! Was it any one of importance?"

"It was only Major Vibart," said Margery, quietly, as she measured the medicine. "He came to say good-bye."

## PART TWO

### CHAPTER I

## PART TWO





## PART TWO

### CHAPTER X

*"Far-seeing heart! if that be all,  
The happy things that did not fall,"  
I sighed, "from every coppice call—  
They never from that garden went.  
Behold their joy, so comfort thee,  
Behold the blossom and the bee,  
For they are yet as good and free  
As when poor Eve was innocent."*

*"Officers' wives get puddings and pies,  
Soldiers' wives get skilly!"*

THE bugle played across the distance between the Camp and Vine Lodge as it had played for twelve months. There was no alteration in the sunny, intervening land, except that the vines had grown a little, and one or two cottages had been repainted. They looked startlingly white against the shaded green background of the trees, whose species were not distinguishable, but were blurred into a harmony of colour as seen from the Vine Lodge garden. Madge sat on the stoep, reading. It was one o'clock, but she did not hurry in. Luncheon was not until half past, and she no longer had to hover in trembling anticipation while Mary laid the cloth and made mistakes. There were few mistakes at Vine Lodge nowadays. It was smoothly and evenly conducted, and such jars as occurred melted imperceptibly away. Madge was a different person in importance to what she had been twelve months ago. The Professor no longer stormed and raved, though his nature demanded that he should still grumble when his liver was out of order.

There was nothing much to grumble at, but he was fertile in excuse. Even his language was more restricted, however, and he did not calculate upon fury to produce a general subservience; his sister had a way of standing and looking at him until he had quite finished, making one small remark, and leaving his presence. The remark was always very small, but no portion of it was wasted. Anthony Cunningham had learned to respect his sister, and think over her scathing little speeches. He knew he could not cow her; he liked the velvet wheels upon which his household worked; he was vain of the social success which attended Vine Lodge in all its ventures, whether at home or abroad; and the result was a growing civility in their relations. Margery had learned to manage a difficult household, and to adapt herself to circumstances which would have worn down many an older and less tenacious nature, but the inherent youth in her stood her in good stead.

She was still very young as she sat in the sunshine, reading; but the year's experience had left its mark on her face, in a certain firm set of her lips, which might have been hardness, if they had not smiled so readily, a certain poise of her head, a certain dry decision in speaking of some indisputable fact of life. She taught with authority, — the authority of knowledge, — and not as do the theoretical scribes. Her secret experience had had its part also in moulding her, but less visibly. The Vibart incident, strangely enough, had had a mental result though its agency was purely physical. As far as Vibart was concerned, he had left her, outwardly, as he found her, and her appearance was as young as ever, not a curve lost, not a roundness of youth displaced, or a line added. Her departure from conventional morality had affected Margery Cunningham as little as though she had been a happy wife. There exists a mistaken notion that this is always the

case with those who do not break the Eleventh Commandment, and that so long as they are not found out they suffer no remorse. Human nature is nobler than that; but the punishment does not necessarily follow swiftly upon the disobedience, which after all is only disobedience to an artificial law, so long as no other factor enters in to actualise the crime. Margery owed no allegiance to any one but Vibart — had wronged no one in her own estimation, since she regarded his wife as dead. The fear of discovery — which means the fear of infringing certain social restrictions — had certainly acted to develop her brain, for she had learned to think and deduce, where before she had only felt and acted. But sin only follows a natural act where some person is wronged, — as far as the natural act goes, reason itself cannot accuse the perpetrator. The unwritten law which divides men and women was the necessary preventive of excess when Humanity put on civilisation and could no longer rule itself naturally, without the Deified “Thou shalt not;” and the natural instinct remains the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever, and verifies itself wherever is the least laxity of law and order, in whatever settlement or state of society men and women find themselves allowed a greater licence, and freed from the fear of the restrictions to which they have subscribed. In all Anglo-Alien society, where the population is a floating one, the tendency to greater intimacy between the sexes is universal, the knowledge that it can be only temporary proving both an excuse and a temptation. The morals of such society are no more assailable than those of a country town in England, whose greater restraint is due to tradition and circumstance. After all, the transference of one unit from the country town to the Anglo-Alien community would probably result, as in Margery’s case, in the unit succumbing to the influence of the atmosphere in which it found itself; and even country

towns are not devoid of their scandals, leaking out through the straight hedges which confine their Gardens of Eden.

When the bugle sounded for the second time, Margery rose leisurely and went into the house. Her glance over the table showed her that everything was satisfactory, and she struck the little table gong and sat down in her own place. A minute later the Professor appeared with an open letter in his hand, and worry in his very footfall.

"The post has just come," he said, with undisguised irritation, as he attacked his luncheon.

"So I perceive! I am afraid it is not a satisfactory one for you, to judge by your expression," said Margery dryly.

"It is some damned fool from Up Country who wants to foist himself upon us!" burst out the Professor, with obvious injury. "He says I stayed with him in Rhodesia some years ago, and he wants to intrude on me for a couple of days while he looks out for a place of abode. Yes, and it is intruding, and so I shall tell him!"

"Nonsense, Anthony, you can't do anything of the sort! If you accepted the man's hospitality, of course you must return it. That is a Colonial law! Is he really a savage?"

"I don't know. I don't remember a thing about him! — except that he lived right Up Country without a soul within six miles of him."

"I suppose you really did stay there?"

"Oh, yes, I was studying the larvæ of certain orthoptera which swarm there, and found his farm most central and convenient for my work. It was well away from interruption of any kind, for he rarely saw a soul save the Kaffirs who worked for him. Now and then another settler would drive over on business. But it was seldom. I was there six weeks, and we only had three visitors."



"Six weeks! My dear Anthony! And you grudge the poor man his 'couple of days'!"

"It is very different. I am a Scientist, and I was in pursuit of a special subject. It was no trouble to him to have me in his house, and we hardly saw anything of each other. We have nothing in common. Now he will be upsetting my house, and interrupting my work, and it is most important that I should not be disturbed just now."

"Yes, it always is! But this man must certainly come, and you must not refuse to put him up even though he wears a blanket and a bead necklace for all his clothing!" said Margery, with quiet decision. "It need not interrupt you. I will undertake him. Does he come straight down from Rhodesia to us?"

"No, he has left farming, and been living just out of Johannesburg for some time. There's his letter —" he threw it across the table. "If you want him to come, you must look after him, that's all! I wash my hands of the whole business."

Margery took the letter with a little shrug, that acknowledged the Professor's skilfulness in shifting a disagreeable responsibility onto her shoulders. He knew perfectly well that he must admit his former entertainer into his house; but as Madge had fortunately taken up the cudgels on his behalf, he seized it as a pretext to excuse himself from further trouble on his own part.

"He writes well," Margery remarked. "'Lansing Crofton,' — it isn't a bad letter. I don't think he can be quite uncivilised, Anthony. If he lives near Johannesburg, he must have seen *some* sort of society. They think themselves much superior to us up there!"

"I hate Johannesburgers! They are all rich fools and poor rogues. It seems a special arrangement of Providence, that the rogues may prey upon the fools! You will find that he brags of his sharp practice, if he

has caught the tone of the place. It is rather too sharp practice for this part, as a rule, as he will find out if he tries it on."

"I see he means to settle in the neighbourhood," said Madge, as she turned the page. "At least he seems rather vague as to what he wants to do. Has he made his fortune?"

"He had not. But he may have swindled somebody since he has been in the Transvaal!" said the Professor, with a disagreeable laugh.

"He does n't give us much notice. According to this, he will reach here to-day! I will drive down to the Station about four and see if I can see any one likely to be he. What is he like, by the way? Will you come with me?"

"Oh, good heavens, how should I know what he is like! I've forgotten all about the bally fool! No, of course, I can't come. If you like to go on a wild goose chase, you can. You'll never find him. You'd better let him turn up by himself. He knows the address."

"Calm yourself!" said Madge, with a mocking smile. "It won't hurt me even though I should drive to the Station for nothing, and it will look attentive and help to smooth over the lack of cordiality on your part. You wouldn't have been able to avoid having him here for one night, in any case, Anthony. He takes your consent for granted, you see, and he says he shall arrive to-day! Even you could hardly insist on his going to the Vineyard or Cogill's."

"I'll bundle him off pretty quickly, if I find him a nuisance!" grumbled the Professor, as he left the room, followed by a last despairing question from his sister — "Can't you give me *any* idea what he is like? You must know whether he is fair or dark — tall or short — that would be something to go on!"

"He is a middle-sized man, to the best of my recollection," snapped the Professor from the hall. "He

had a beard when savaging it in the veld — probably because he was too lazy to shave. A dirty trick ! His hair is, or was, very dark. He probably shaves blue ! ” Then he went, and Madge laughed in spite of herself.

She gave the necessary orders to the servants to prepare a room for Mr. Crofton, and having seen them carried out, went out again onto the stoep in a leisurely fashion, to await a reasonable hour for her “ wild goose chase ” drive to the Station. She had a book with her, and it was poetry. This was not a general taste of Margery’s, but she understood it better now than she had done a year since, and some things in the unpretentious little volume had appealed to her. The book had belonged to Vibart ; his name had been written in it, in a woman’s handwriting. When he first brought it to her to show her some lines that he thought applicable to their mutual feelings, she had been half jealous of the unknown donor, and had kept the book because she did not like him to have it. Since then she had thought more of the woman who had given it to him than of Jack. She wondered who she was, and if her experiences had been in any way like her own. It was a curious little odd volume to have come into Vibart’s possession, and some experience must surely have been connected with it to make it open so easily at this —

“ Something has gone.  
Oh, life, great giver as thou art,  
Something has gone.  
Not love, for love as years roll on  
Plays evermore a fuller part.  
But of the treasure of my heart  
Something has gone.”

Margery dimly understood it, and realised without as yet being afraid of the truth of such a realisation. Loss meant nothing to her as yet, while she did not recognise the value of the thing foregone. She regarded

it coldly, as an incontrovertible fact, but without a pang.

“ But of the treasure of my heart  
Something has gone ! ”

She turned the leaves lazily ; few people ever saw that little old brown volume, because Vibart, in a mood of more sentiment than caution, had made marginal notes to the more erotic of the poems. He had as a rule taught and practised prudence ; but the more riotous emotions will not only quicken men and women into a temporary comprehension of things that would otherwise be a sealed book to them, — poetry, amongst others, — but will occasionally relax their worldly wisdom.

“ Rappelle-toi ? ” Vibart had written against some marked lines —

“ We ’re of one mind to love, and there ’s no let ;  
Remember that, and all the rest forget.  
And let ’s be happy, dearest, while we may,  
Ere yet to-morrow shall be called to-day.  
To-morrow may be heedless, idle-hearted :  
One night ’s enough for love to have met and parted ! ”

Other annotations of his were equally applicable and outspoken. Indeed in one case he had written such copious comparisons between her and the lady of the poem, that she had been fain to rub them out.

“ What are lips, but to be kissed ?  
What are eyes, not to be praised ?  
What is she that would resist  
Love’s desire to be embraced ?  
What her heart that will not dare  
Suffer poor Love to linger there ? ”

“ I suppose it is always like that,” said Margery vaguely. She had sometimes tried wistfully to picture a wider and more sacred love, but experience failed her. She looked down at the printed page regretfully.

“ What are lips, but to be kissed ? ” —



Then her eyes went along the gravel of the drive, and brightened. Some one was turning out of the lane, between the two big beds of flowers bordering the drive, and coming straight towards her, — some one with a sunburnt face and smiling eyes that were large and clear even at that distance. Madge slipped the little brown book out of sight, and called a cheery greeting.

“What’s become of the Meet?”

“There was n’t one to-day,” said True, as he shook hands. “But we had a good run last Saturday. All out by Bishop’s Court, and across the Peninsula, almost to Kalk Bay. We killed at Kalk Bay. He was such a pretty fellow! I should have liked to bring you the skin, Lady!”

“Poor little jackal — I wonder you can be so cruel, True!” Margery laughed a little, and pulled her dress away from the edge of the stoep. True accepted the invitation. He sat down, and resting his shoulder against her knee, looked up at her expressively.

“Well?” she said, still laughing. “Comfortable?”

“Very, thanks. What are you doing to-day?”

“Anthony is in a fever because a man from Up Country has expressed his intention of taking us by storm. I’m going to the Station to try and find him presently. It sounds rather cool, but the poor man naturally expects to find the hospitality he cast upon the waters returned to him after many days! He little knows his sometime guest!”

“Cunningham stayed there?”

“Yes. We must return it.”

“Is he much of an outsider?”

“Oh, no. I don’t think so. He has been near Johannesburg for some time. That sounds rather awful, but I daresay he is inoffensive enough. Anyhow, I sha’n’t put myself out about it.”

“I’ll come and help you entertain him,”

"Will you? You are a dear, True!" Her hand fell lightly on his shoulder. True sat very square under the slight pressure, as steady and utterly oblivious of himself as he would have been under fire. They had grown intimate friends during the past twelve months, — a friendship amply typified by the fact that as Margery laid her hand on his shoulder, she did not happen to look at him. She was, indeed, thinking more of the coming guest than of Truman. It is possible that he knew this, but he did not speak for a minute.

"I shall have to take him about with me," said Madge, referring to Mr. Crofton. "I hope he won't be very dreadful! I won't take him to Mount Villiers on Thursday until I feel sure of him, Mrs. Cromo Dame might say things. The Hearne girls are charitable, he shall go there first."

"Are you going to Mrs. Cromo Dame's?" said True. "You have only visited at Mount Villiers lately, have you?"

"Within the last three months — since she went into society again. She called on me, and I got to know her better. Do you know, I quite like her! She is so clever and amusing. I find her much more entertaining than most of the people about here."

"I don't think she's a bad sort. I never did." The quiet neat sentences dropped out of True's mouth and hardly expressed anything. "She is going about rather soon, is n't she. I hardly realised what she looked like as a widow, before I met her at the Drysdales!"

"Oh, Cromo Dame has been dead over twelve months, True! I don't see why she should retire from the world entirely, because her husband died of that sudden, terrible illness, poor man! She must have had a hard time of it too, perpetually sick-nursing as she was at the last."

"I don't think I should care for her much as a sick nurse! I was rather sorry for Cromo Dame."

"She would be all right, — she is a kind-hearted woman, True. Where is your usual charity? If Mrs. Cayley had only been more like her —"

"I dined with V. C. the other night," remarked True. "She was n't there, of course."

"No — she never is! Poor Mr. Cayley! I met him at the Hearnese a few weeks ago, and really talked to him for the first time. What a nice voice he has! — Oh, why did he ever marry that woman!"

"It was propinquity, Lady. I wanted him to get away, when he first grew so intimate with her, as Miss Montfort —"

"I wish he had! I wonder why he did n't? I remember hearing something about it at the time —"

Madge stopped in her turn. She had met them the day she went to Hout's Bay, and spoken of it to Vibart. No connection between Vibart's satisfied acceptance of her statements, and Cayley's marriage, occurred to her mind, but the remembrance was not a pleasant one.

"You have never seen much of V. C., have you?" True said gently.

"No. And now I do, I like him very much! I spent the evening at the Hearnese with him and Major Yeats (in default of you, of course, True), and I felt much invigorated. Last year, somehow, I never talked to any one but Mr. Forrester and Teddy Barton and all that set. Isn't it funny how one gets periods of people!"

"Pete has been away, you see. His leave is but a thing of yesterday. You'll take him on again — perhaps? But I like Cayley. He has moods, you know, but he's all right in between."

"I wish his wife were all right at any time! She is a most extraordinary woman! One *can't* know her. True, — does she really drink?"

"I think — she is n't very strong — and it's a hot climate, Lady!"

"I see. How we do bind our sins on the back of the climate!" Madge gave a merry cold little laugh. She had made the climate an excuse once, also. "Anyhow I'm sorry he married her!" she said. "What a lot of things have happened in the last twelve months, have n't they — ! Mr. Cayley's marriage, Cromo Dame's death, and Mr. Forrester's leave (only he is back again, so that does n't count any more), and the Dodds have gone Home, and Mr. Livingston. I still miss Mr. Livingston somehow. He seemed such a character of the neighbourhood. He was amongst my first impressions, and I think he will be one of my last, even though he should n't come back."

"He generally returns after a while, they say. He was an odd old fellow, was n't he! Sometimes he looked about sixteen, and sometimes six hundred."

"He once told me that he thought he was sixty-two, but occasionally Nature got mixed and reversed the figures. I am sure he seemed more like twenty-six. I do miss him — but I miss Starling still more!"

"I had a letter this mail!" said True, smiling.

"Did you? What did she say? When are they coming out? Do sit up and talk, True! I don't see why Starling wrote to you, and not to me!"

"Perhaps she addressed it wrong!" said True, innocently. He did not sit up as directed; indeed he leaned his brown head back against Madge's knee, and stared with all his big eyes into the distant, speckless heavens. "She says they will be back next month — she thinks."

"I *am* glad! Ar' n't you? I've missed Starling fearfully. When I was at the Redmaynes the other night, I kept on looking about and expecting to see her in that blue dress with the beads! Do you remember?"

"I liked that dress," said True, thoughtfully. "The beads went all round at the back of the bodice, you know, and when she leaned back against a hard



chair it made them come off sometimes. I used to try and save them ! ”

“ True ! ” Madge dimpled with laughter. “ How *can* you ! You ought to be ashamed of yourself ! — and I ’m sure Starling would n’t let you. Dear old Star ! I believe you ’ve missed her as much as any one.”

The smile died out of True’s eyes. Then came back from the sky and fixed themselves on a glint of blue above his head, between two lines of lashes. “ Yes, I missed her,” he said. “ I was very lonely indeed at first — until you took me up ! ”

The two slits of blue widened a little with a comprehensive surprise. “ Oh, he wants to flirt ! ” thought Madge, amused. “ Well, I don’t mind. It ’s a sunny afternoon, and the climate shall answer for it.”

“ And I suppose when Starling comes back it will be my turn to feel neglected ! ” she said with a little sigh, and a smile that trembled round her lips and threatened dimples. “ Um — ? ”

“ Oh, no, Lady ! ”

“ Oh, but yes, True ! Now you know — ” Instead of finishing her sentence she leaned forward and arranged a little spray of heath in his buttonhole. True turned his head swiftly and his moustache brushed against the confiding little hand, — no doubt to Madge’s very great surprise.

“ True, you really should n’t ! ” she said. “ I ’m not the Queen ! The next time the band plays the National Anthem I shall think it must be for me.”

“ I ’ll remind you ! ”

Margery laughed again, her amusement a little quickened with excitement, and at the same moment a clock somewhere in the house struck four, the notes sounding through her laughter.

“ Good gracious ! I must go and look after this Crofton man,” she said rising hastily. “ How dreadfully idle you have made me ! I suppose it will get

chilly later, so I must wrap up, but it does seem ridiculous to wear furs with such sunshine."

"The summer is holding out better this year," said True, rising also. "Last June the rains began. Do you remember the day the Tracker went? That was the first of them."

"Why *do* you call Major Vibart the Tracker?" said Margery, carelessly, without further answer. She picked up her secreted book and went into the house; a momentary shadow from the rain-sodden day he had referred to, seemed to have fallen over her face. It flashed back on her memory as vividly as if it had been yesterday, — the souging of the fir-tree tops, and the level grey skies, the deluge of rain blotting out the mountains, and Vibart's face and voice. . . .

"I am coming to help entertain!" True's voice followed her into the house as she disappeared.

"All right!" she called back, hardly attending, and ran upstairs to her bedroom to dress.

It had been a warm day, but as the sunlight went, the chill of the winter weather made itself felt. Madge drove swiftly along the red roads, through the aisles of fir-trees, that had seemed so strange and new to her at first, and were now so equally familiar that they formed the background to any scene which might depict itself in her mind. The wind blew cold and keen across the bright clear land, and Madge shivered a little in her furs as she sat outside the Station in the cart. "*It was* rather mad of me to come!" she thought. "I have n't even an idea what train he will take. I will only wait for the next, and then go home and leave him to find his way as best he can. There's Mrs. Redmayne!" She nodded to a handsome woman who came out of the Station, and Mrs. Redmayne stopped to speak to her.

"Have you come to meet your brother, Miss Cunningham?" she said. "I saw him in town." She

stopped there, but to herself she added, "I wonder if she knows? I don't like the woman, but then I don't like Anthony Cunningham. Perhaps he means nothing. I won't tell this little girl he was with any one."

"No!" laughed Madge. "I did n't even know he had gone in. I expect he will come out by tram. I am here on rather a fruitless quest, I'm afraid — I've come to meet a man I've never seen, and don't even know what train he will come by! Isn't that irresponsible?"

"We are all irresponsible," returned Mrs. Redmayne, with a shrug of her shapely shoulders. "But I am sorry for you waiting about in this wind. Oh, Miss Cunningham, Mr. Tullock has asked me to luncheon on the *Skate* next Wednesday, and suggested my bringing you. It is rather a long journey to Simon's Town. Would you care to come?"

"I should immensely — but what am I to do with this man? He is going to stay with us, and I don't know in the least if he is possible."

"Never mind, bring him too. It will be a good way of entertaining him. If he proves too abominable, let's hope the motion of the boat will make him ill, — or we might contrive a little accident and drop him overboard!"

They parted laughing. Mrs. Redmayne hailed a Cape cart and was driven away to call upon her acquaintance in Wynberg, — she lived at Rondesbosch, — and Margery turned her attention to the other passengers who had come by the same train.

"Moderately tall — very dark — with a beard!" she repeated mechanically. "That man would do, but he is clean-shaven. Can he have cast his beard away from him with other habits of the wilds?"

The man in question was standing on the Station steps, looking thoughtfully at the stream of faces passing him. His glance went beyond them and encountered Madge's after a minute, and they regarded each

other doubtfully. Then the stranger had an inspiration. He turned to a porter and asked in particularly distinct tones if he could tell him the way to Vine Lodge, and Margery jumped out of the cart in a hurry.

"I can!" she said hastily. "I live there. Are you Mr. Crofton?"

"Yes!"

"I am Margery Cunningham. I am sorry Anthony had to go into Cape Town, but he sent me to meet you in his place." (What should we do without our sisters?) "What a fortunate thing you asked for our house! I had just begun to think how wild it was of me to dream of discovering any one I had never seen before!"

"I really did it in the faint hope that you might know Professor Cunningham and direct me," said Crofton, candidly. "I thought you looked at me as if you were expecting somebody!"

"I think we were both very clever! Is that your luggage? I am afraid we must have a cart to bring it up. I can't offer to put it behind. Robert, call that cart, please, and arrange about Mr. Crofton's luggage coming up. Now, Mr. Crofton, come along!"

She made room for him in the place Robert had vacated, and three minutes later they were driving homewards triumphantly, Madge chattering in her inevitably sociable way, and Crofton listening. He was rather untalkative on the whole; he seemed to have brought the great silences of the lonely veld, where he had lived, down to the coast with him, through all the stir of Johannesburg life which he had experienced in the interval. Madge talked bravely on the homeward way, but the personality beside her began to touch her with something of the same effect that the African night had done at Hout's Bay, and once or twice since. The overmastering sense of a great stillness seemed to be forcing its influence upon her.



"It will be perfectly awful to live in the house with that!" she thought, in dismay. "It is like having the mountains indoors. I shall certainly keep True up to his promise of helping to entertain."

"I am afraid my taking you by storm in this way was rather inconsiderate," said Crofton, at this moment. "I only decided to come down to the Western Province at a minute's notice, and when I wrote to the Professor of course I thought I was coming to a bachelor establishment. I hope I have n't put you out, Mrs. Cunningham!"

"You *are* coming to a bachelor establishment!" remarked Madge, dryly. "Professor Cunningham is my brother — *not* my husband!"

"Oh!"

Then they stole a covert glance at each other, and discovered that they were both laughing. Also, very naturally, Crofton looked at Margery afresh with a different interest. The fact that her state was not the one he had assigned her, made her a new person in his eyes. He had to begin all over again and destroy his first ten minutes' impressions with regard to her.

"You are so very unlike your brother that I naturally concluded he had married," he said frankly. "He must be a great deal older than you."

"Twenty years or so. A mere trifle, from an entomological point of view. Sometimes I think Anthony looks upon me as the elder. He is my half-brother."

Lansing Crofton pondered on these things while he sat at dinner that night. It was the first opportunity he had had of comparing Anthony Cunningham and Margery, for the Professor only appeared with the fish, when he shook hands most hospitably with his guest, explaining that he feared he was a bad host, his profession kept him a perfect slave, but he could trust his sister to represent him far more satisfactorily than he could do it himself. The serene softness of Margery's

face never altered in the slightest during this tirade or Crofton's equally polite acceptance of the situation; Anthony's influence upon her was too deep for the display of surface feelings. He hammered out her illusions and beliefs into a deep-seated and ingrained cynicism, without hardening a line of her face as yet.

"I shall be perfectly satisfied if Miss Cunningham will show me something of the neighbourhood," Crofton said merely. "I always had a fancy for buying a house near Cape Town, and spending six months of the year here at least. I have a lot of business to do hereabouts; I hope you won't think me rude if I am out a good deal."

"Poor man!" thought Margery. "I wonder if he sees through Anthony! He is inventing business to be out of my way."

The sting of her brother's short-comings made her doubly gracious; the Professor did not alter his usual routine for so insignificant a guest, and retired to his own sanctum, where it was high treason to intrude upon his slumbers. Margery took Crofton into the drawing-room, but asked if he would like a cigarette on the stoep.

"I can't offer to smoke with you," she said; "but I will come and sit out there, if you like."

"I am afraid it would be too cold for you. It is a chilly night. I will smoke later, thanks. Do you sing?"

"Yes — can you?"

"I can."

"Come, that's decided. Look through that music and see if I have anything you know. How do you like this?"

By some freak for which she could never account, she began to sing "Lovelace."

"Why do you come to-night, to-night?  
So many miles of wind and rain! —"

and before she had got half-way through the second verse she wished she had not begun it. A sense of distaste was upon her; it had been a favourite of Vibart's, and she had sung it the morning after. . . . All the memories it brought up were repulsive to her now that she had outgrown the feeling which had enshrined them. For the first time the vulgarity of the whole episode was apparent to her mind. She felt that the thing which it had seemed natural and excusable to do, was hardly to be tolerated. This man, this stranger, leaning over the piano and watching her with intent eyes, what would he think of her if he could know? It was not so much the fact of her lapse from virtue itself that horrified her at the minute; had she been carried away once by a gust of passion, she would have looked upon it as a terrible thing, but with something of the dignity of a crime. But the details which had led up to it, continued with it, and were always connected in her memory with it, were an eternal degradation. They were commonplace, and yet they shocked her to remember. Vibart's love had been of as coarse a quality as his nature; his wooing had been as broadly sensual as his mind, and he had taken advantage of Margery's inexperience to make reticence no part of their intercourse. She felt, under the speechless scrutiny of Crofton's gaze, that her past experiences had had an atmosphere of indecency. But the spur of her discomfort made her sing none the worse for that.

"Thank you," he said as she finished. "Do you ever try to follow out the story of a song?"

"Very often," she answered with the pleasurable thrill which comes of unexpected sympathy. "Why?"

"I was only wondering if she gave in, or if she were too much afraid."

"No, — I think she gave in. You see she liked him all the better for risking the danger. That is why she referred to it!"

"And he evidently grasped the fact that it would prove an attraction —

"'Oh, but I come with much delight,  
All things I love are dangerous!'

Do you think she was married?"

The question gave Margery some surprise. "I don't know — I had n't thought," she said. "Yes, I suppose she was."

An impulse seized her to ask what he thought himself, — if the immorality of the suggestion throughout seemed to him worse in the supposititious case of the woman being married; but her own sense of guilt held her tongue-tied. She dared not attack such a subject, for she had a nervous dread of seeming conversant with it. She gave a little gasp, and gathered breath to ask him to sing in his turn. In the pause before she spoke, the door opened to admit the servant who announced Captain Truman.

True was in uniform, having come straight down from Mess. The bravery of his red and gold, and the smile in his eyes, seemed equally effective in dispersing the seriousness of the moment before his entrance. Margery went to meet him, and introduced him to Crofton, whose face expressed no surprise at such an apparition, though he merely shook hands without a word. True's appearance had been quite as unexpected to Margery as to Crofton, for his final speech to her, that he was coming to help entertain, had fallen on dulled ears. At any rate she had not looked for him so promptly.

But the atmosphere of the room was immediately changed, and under the spell of True's sunny friendliness even Crofton became more sociable. At the same time, he appeared further off from her, Madge thought; they had dropped from the momentary intimacy into mere distant acquaintance, or in some way True's



better established position with her seemed to have glided between them. True was as good as his word, and did help to entertain, skilfully keeping up the ball of conversation, choosing Madge's songs for her to sing, and drawing Crofton out over the news from Johannesburg. Crofton became comparatively fluent in talking to another man ; but when Madge and True were talking, he relapsed into silence and watched them. They had many inevitable references he could not understand, and interests of which he knew nothing. "Sing this, Lady!" True said, putting a song before her, and Madge sang, with a mischievous glance at him at certain words, while he leaned his head against the piano as he sat by her side, in much the same attitude that he had taken in the afternoon, and gazed at her devotedly.

"Here in happy Arcady  
Love is lord of you and me!  
Sings the Starling,  
'Kiss thy darling!'  
While the dove doth bid us love!"

sang Madge, accentuating the third line.

"Sings the *Starling*,  
'Kiss thy darling!'"

It was very pretty to watch, and Crofton turned over the music and watched it. When it came to his turn, he surprised them, for his voice was unusual for an amateur ; but he would only sing one song, and when Truman suggested a cigarette on the stoep, he assented at once. They went out together and walked up and down, smoking and talking in a desultory fashion. Madge threw open the window, and went on playing and singing to herself. She could hear their feet pacing past, or a broken sentence, and they could hear snatches of her songs. Once she caught something about the dynamite monopoly, and smiled to herself as she flung them back a couplet.

"Fortune little matters  
If love goes by!"

"I must be going, Lady!" True said a little later. He came up to the window and shook hands, but would not come in again. "The Professor is waking up," he said, "and wants to go to bed. And Crofton is tired. I've got my cap and coat all right, don't come out, it's cold."

"Good-night, True. I'm so glad to have seen you!" said Margery, gaily. The afternoon returned to her mind, and an imp of mischief prompted her to return the pressure of the hand holding hers.

"I suppose — you did n't play God save the Queen, did you?"

"No, I did n't know you were going, so I did not regard the performance as finished."

"Will you play it now, perhaps?"

"No, I won't!" said Margery, with a flash of memory and comprehension. "Good-night, True. Don't be ridiculous!"

Crofton was standing outside the window also in the darkness, with the end of his cigarette between his fingers. He looked on.

"I wonder if I am going to get on with Mr. Crofton," thought Margery, as she fell asleep that night. "He is very unobtrusive, anyway. I wonder what he meant about that song. It seems to me rather an extraordinary thing to have said. Perhaps I ought n't to have sung it, — it never occurred to me to analyse the words before. But he must evidently have something in him, besides silence, or he would n't have thought of it." A year ago she would have said, "I wonder what he thinks of me!" but she had reached a stage when her thoughts of other people seemed to her of at least as much importance as theirs of her.

## CHAPTER XI

*"We had a message long ago  
That like a river peace should flow,  
And Eden bloom again below.  
We heard, and we began to wait;  
Full soon that message men forgot.  
Yet waiting is their destined lot,  
And waiting for they knew not what,  
They strive with yearnings passionate."*

THE Drysdales were, and always had been, unostentatiously domestic. They took their share in the social life round them, but it formed the sauce to their dinner rather than the dinner itself. Society made existence pleasanter, but they could have done without it. They were completely bound up in their three boys; but except to those people who were very intimate at the house, they did not discourse on the subject, nor did they repeat nursery sayings and doings, save to each other. For this alone they should have been loved and cherished.

"But the fact is," Clarice Drysdale said dryly, "that it is very few people whom we consider intelligent enough to appreciate the Boys, and the Baby is too sacred a subject to be bandied about in public. We are quite as infatuated about our progeny as any other self-centred couple; but the priceless armour of our conceit makes a secret of it."

Madge Cunningham was one of the few who had seen Mrs. Drysdale really "at home" among her children, and been a breathless witness of Ossy transformed from an impenetrable man of the world into a mere father of a family. He held a position in the Houses of Assembly which kept him in Cape Town the

greater portion of most days ; but when he came out to Wynberg, he was more interested in Eric and Jan's miraculous escapes and developing eccentricities, than in any increase of the Bond party, or flank movement of the Rhodesians. Margery had never quite gauged Oswald Drysdale, but she liked to hear him talk with a liking that increased as her knowledge of that state of Colonisation in which she found herself increased also.

She dropped in on Mrs. Drysdale in Wynbergian fashion some days after Crofton's arrival, and sat down to talk. It was half-past eleven in the morning, and Mrs. Drysdale was combining the business of a large correspondence with a maternal guard over the respectable baby, who had grown large enough to explore the edible qualities of penwipers. She rang for his nurse when Madge appeared, and had him carried away, a fat white bundle of smiles and sugar candy, which latter he was sucking.

"Sit down, Madge, and tell me where you have been," she said. "I have'n't seen you for days. Oh wait a moment—I must just address this to the Mowbray boy. I want him to come to dinner and eat grouse. Major Yeats is on leave at Beaufost West, and has perfectly deluged me with game. It won't keep two days, while the weather is still warm."

"Is n't Mr. Mowbray the boy who has come out to the Duke's?"

"Yes, changed from the first Battalion. His sister is one of my oldest friends, and I promised to look after him and see that he had a good time, and now the minute he arrives the Duke's go under canvas out near Simon's Town. Is n't it a pity!"

"Do they? True never told me. I am sorry. I shall miss them when they are further off. Who comes here?"

"This Regiment that is just out, — the Rutlandshires.



I saw some of them at the theatre the other night. Not a decent coat among them, — a worse set of screws I never beheld."

"What a pity! The Duke's weren't smart, but they did look all right in uniform. True came in the other night, and I thought what a dear little thing he looked."

"True is particular. They say the regimental tailor groans over the fit of his waistcoats. Will you come and meet the Mowbray boy?"

"I'm sorry, but I can't. We've got a man a-staying with us from Up Country. At least he lives near Johannesburg now, but he was in Rhodesia when Anthony made his acquaintance."

"Oh, I see! Did the Professor make use of him to study beetles in the veld?"

"Exactly! — so now he makes use of us to study civilisation in the Colony. Anthony won't be disturbed of course, so I have had to take him about."

"H'm! — what is he like? Possible?"

"I have hardly made up my mind. He improves on acquaintance. At first he was so quiet that he oppressed me, but after he shook down a little, we got on better. I can't say I like him very much, but we are perfectly friendly, and he is very little trouble. He has gone to Newlands to-day to look at a house. I gave him the cart and my blessing, but did not feel bound to accompany him."

"Does he mean to settle here?"

"He says so. I can't quite make out if he is rich; but he seems to be well enough off to have given up business."

"He is not very young then? The English supposition that all our millionaires are early successes has always struck me with wonder. If you think of it, the men who have made fortunes are all grey and stout and have obviously had to barter youth for wealth. You

can't succeed in the Colony without working harder for it than at Home, — and you want a certain class of brains too ! ”

“ And an iron constitution and no nerves ! But Mr. Crofton is not by any means elderly. I should think he was about five and thirty.”

“ Then, my dear Madge, he is not a very rich man. But he may be comfortably off.”

“ Yes, I think that is about it. He has an idea of going in for a wine farm at Constantia.”

“ Not a bad idea, if he knows anything about it. Anyhow it will do for a hobby, as you say he has retired from business. Absolute idleness for an energetic man of that age must be the shortest road to insanity. He is not married ? ”

“ No ! ”

“ Is he attracted by you ? ”

How frank women can be to each other, and how infinitely more truthful than men ! A man, asked such a question, must have boasted, with or without reason. Margery spoke as honestly as she knew.

“ Yes, in a way he is. But he seems to me a man who likes to domineer, and I think I only attract him because he finds me ready to meet him on equal ground. Once he had mastered me, I should not interest him any more.”

“ I know the sort of man. Do you know, Madge, you have altered very much in your point of view ? When you first came out you would have described to me what the man was like personally, and what he had done and said to you, simply and literally. Now you are chiefly interested in his mental attitude and his character.”

“ Perhaps that is because I am not much impressed with him physically,” said Margery, laughing. “ He is a middle-sized man with very dark hair and a sunburnt skin, if you want to know. He is clean-shaven and has beautiful teeth. What I like best about him is the

direct way he looks you in the face, with a very steady gaze — ”

“There again ! the *way* he looks ! But what colour are his eyes ? ”

“Oh, dear ! I will bring him to see you, and you shall judge. No, let me see ! — they are something between green and grey and hazel. Curious eyes, now I come to think of it, and very uncommon on the whole. He sings beautifully, Clarice.”

“Does he ? And you sing with each other of course, while your brother sleeps, — what is that man thinking about ! I have had occasion to remark that before with regard to you and him. Will you come to dinner and meet the Mowbray boy and bring Mr. Crofton ? ”

“Yes, I should like to. We are going to lunch on the *Skate* on Wednesday with Mrs. Redmayne. I met her at the Station the other day.”

“She’s a nice woman. Beau Livingston would insist that V. C. followed her too obviously ; but Beau talked scandal in his light way as much as any one. Cissie’s reign was a good one for V. C. compared with the present state of things ! ”

“Poor Mr. Cayley ! I called there once, Clarice.”

“Did you see her ? ”

“No — I *heard* her ! ”

“Oh ! — she is rather expressive I know.”

“She was talking at the cook. Well, no one knows better than I do how one would like to stamp on a Kaffir cook at times, but it was simply sickening. I wonder where she learned such language.”

“I can’t think how she managed to disguise her weaknesses before she married him. Mrs. Cromo Dame *must* have known ! They say she is rarely sober four nights of the week. Think what a home that must be for any man ! Mr. Forrester says that V. C. tried to break his neck at the last gymkana.”

“How awful ! Do you know I never saw her that

day, — I could n't ! A servant came to me and said that her mistress was engaged, but would see me if I could wait. I felt sure she was bracing herself up, and would come in smelling of spirits and face powder, and I really could n't bear it. I had only called for Mr. Cayley's sake, so I said I had an engagement, and rushed away."

Mrs. Drysdale was silent. The same weariness and shadow which had crossed her face once in speaking to Beau Livingston at her own gate, was on it now. He had been reminding her on that occasion that Madge was happy without intelligence, — the happiness of mere physical enjoyment, and that they had lost the power ; the helplessness of humanity against the destiny which the days and months and years evolve, was the paramount feeling in Clarice's mind on both occasions, and gave a sudden mysterious twilight effect to her face, as if the light had faded. A sense of personal impotence always brought it there ; but all she said was, " We cannot help him."

Knowing that her own guest was safe for some hours, Margery stayed to luncheon, and romped with the boys afterwards. The performance ended with the ringing of a bell which sent the two children off, helter-skelter, tea-wards, and Margery returned to the house to say good-bye.

" I must be getting back now," she said regretfully. " Mr. Crofton will be home any time, and Anthony went out this morning without telling me where he was going, or when he would be back."

" You look ten years younger when you have been playing with the boys," Mrs. Drysdale said approvingly. " At the present moment you are about eleven ! It is a great blessing to be so easily and heartily amused as you are, Madge."

" I am generally amused with whatever happens to me. I think it is because I am a very unimaginative



person, and live every moment of my life through exactly as it comes. What day do we dine here with the Mowbray boy?"

"Friday. Please bring some music, and ask Mr. Crofton if he will sing for us." She kissed the girl, and then spoke abruptly in a different tone, "Margery, when your brother goes out all day like this, what is he doing? Butterfly hunting?"

"Good gracious, Clarice, I don't know! Anthony and I live and let live. We never interfere with each other. He made me understand from the first that to ask a question was worse than putting your bare hand on a prickly pear. And I have gradually gained a like liberty."

"Oh! well, it seems to me an equally dangerous plan. If a man refuses to have a question asked, however innocently, I am forced into conclusions, and that is a pity. I would rather he lied. There is a certain safeguard in having to evade the truth, Madge. Nobody really likes lying."

"I suppose Anthony is like all other men. He has his own life — I certainly do not wish to investigate it!"

"Oh, I did not mean that! There is no escaping generalities. I was wondering if there were not a particular cause for his absences?"

"A woman, you mean? Very likely. It really does n't concern me. He is old enough to look after himself, and not to get into an entanglement."

"Run away, Madge. Your philosophy is beyond me, — God keep you, my child."

She looked after the sunny white figure with an untranslatable expression in her eyes. "I like that girl; I always did," she said. "She still represents a discovery to me, — a successful discovery socially, but one that I have not entirely probed myself. How she has altered! She has twice the character she had last

year. I wonder what happened to her with regard to Jack Vibart? How people talked ! but that, of course, she did not know. I have no doubt that she thinks that no one suspected any intimacy between them. And even I did not hear it all. Polly Harbord tried to tell me something Clive Forrester had said one day, and I declined to hear. I almost wish I had now ; it might be useful to warn her, if she got into any difficulty, and the story cropped up again. I wonder what True knows? "

Madge was making her way, meanwhile, between the blue plumbago hedges, back to Vine Lodge. It was only five minutes' walk, and she was glad, for the sun was going down and she had a latent fear of Kaffirs, even along those familiar roads. It is a characteristic of civilisation in South Africa, that savage nature is generally to be found on the other side of the hedge. A rich man's carefully cultivated garden will be bounded by a line beyond which is a cheerful prospect of uncultivated land with the appearance of raw veld ; a pretty red road, open and harmless in the morning sunlight, will change suddenly, at the rapid descent of darkness, into a horribly lonely place, with battle, murder, and sudden death, — or worse, — lying in wait in the hundred yards or so between one friend's house and another's. But then, the houses stand well away from the road, in their own grounds as a rule, and people who possess any nerves are haunted by a dread that a call for help would be lost in the space between. Robberies do take place, though not often ; but the white women have two bogies that they shun, — the Kaffir after dark, and the snake which glides across the soft, red earth and is hardly visible. Madge quickened her pace, instinctively, though her brain was busy with the problem of Mrs. Drysdale's query about the Professor. Turning a corner, sharply, she almost ran up against some one coming along by the hedge, and started

back with a little cry. As he lifted his cap, she recognised, with relief, that he was a white man, and some one she knew. It was V. C.

"Oh, Mr. Cayley, would you mind walking to my gate with me?" she said, with a gasp and a little laugh. "I stayed rather late at Mrs. Drysdale's, and I hate these roads after dark. It is only two minutes' walk, — am I taking you much out of your way?"

"No, I am entirely at your service." He turned and walked with her at once, a reassuring figure in very English tweed, with his cap crammed down over his vexed blue eyes. Whatever mood V. C. was in, his eyes were rather melancholy; but their usual expression was one which men called ill-tempered, and women, dissatisfied. Margery glanced at him with a certain kindness: apart from any sympathy for a spoiled life, she liked his face, though he was not handsome, being brown and thin with a ragged moustache and deep lines drawn round the mouth and eyes. V. C. was barely thirty, but he looked ten years older.

"This is the consequence of feminine gossip, you see," said Madge, gaily. "We procrastinate, and then have to appeal for a masculine bodyguard."

"It's about all men are good for, from a woman's point of view, isn't it?" he said with a half smile.

"Oh, one or two things besides, — to manage the tax-collector and to vote, and other necessary but tiresome things of that sort."

"Yes, I daresay. That's just like your sex, you are so crafty. You think all this in your inmost hearts, and yet you contrive to give men the impression that you think a lot of them!" V. C. was half jesting and half serious. His soft, complaining tone came out of the dusk at her side and seemed a part of the fading light. Madge knew he was talking nonsense to pass the time, and keep himself from graver thoughts that drove him mad, and she humoured him.

"Crafty!" she said, laughing. "What a very odd word! Am I crafty, please?"

"Well, now, ar'n't you? Look at the present case as an instance. You really only want me as an escort because you are afraid of the dark; but you are being very sweet to me in order to make me think that you like walking with me."

"Well, really, Mr. Cayley, you wouldn't like me to be disagreeable, would you? And as to being 'very sweet,' I am nothing of the sort. I am just as usual."

"Yes, that's just what I mean."

"Oh, then you mean that I am always crafty!"

"No — only very sweet."

They looked at each other and laughed through the dusk.

"I am afraid you must not look for single reasons, or single emotions of any sort from us," said Madge, more seriously. "You will never understand us if you try and translate what we do from one motive, for we generally have twelve. Life is never a very simple thing to a woman. It must always be more or less complicated, from her very nature."

"I don't understand women," said he, slowly, proving by the very admission that he had the power when he chose. "A woman is never dependable. She has so many courses of action that she may pursue. Now a man has only one, in most situations."

"Yes, it is generally the one he likes best," said Madge, quietly.

"I suppose we have n't much to boast of." He gave a sharp, hurt sigh.

"I think we must 'accept ourselves as we are,' as Scherer says. I found that sentence in 'Amiel's Journal' the other day, and it struck me."

"It is a comforting philosophy, certainly," V. C. said rather dryly, as they turned into the lane from the open



gate, and paused by tacit consent at the beginning of the drive. Vine Lodge loomed up square and black behind them, glaring at the increasing darkness with the red eyes of lamp-lit windows, not yet darkened. It suggested inside warmth and a home atmosphere, at which V. C. looked hungrily, as though he coveted something beyond his reach. He was standing just where Vibart had stood on the night when he came back, unexpectedly, and found Margery shut out of the house, — the night when. . . . She remembered, and shifted her position, involuntarily, to make him move also.

"So you read 'Amiel,' " he said.

"Yes, but I do not know if I like him. He is so afraid of action of any sort. I feel at last that I must make him *do* something, never mind his regretting it or not."

"I think most action is a mistake, — important, serious action, I mean, that involves consequence of any kind. Can't you sympathise with Amiel? I can. I think I must have something of the same weakness of mind."

"No, I don't sympathise with him, he irritated me, as I say. I can more easily forgive sins of commission than omission. It seems to me that to have been good by avoiding absolute bad, is never to have lived at all. Besides it is only negative virtue."

"You should read Browning. That is exactly his creed —

" 'If you choose to play! it's my principle,  
Let a man contend to the uttermost  
For his life's set prize, be it what it will.  
The counter our lover's staked, was lost  
As surely as if it were lawful coin;  
And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost

" 'Is, the lamp unlit and the ungirt loin,  
Though the end in sight was a vice, I say.' "

Afterwards it struck Madge how strange it was to be

standing there in the dark, on the very spot where Vibart had persuaded her, . . . and to hear V. C.'s voice repeating the bold philosophy which, if applied to her own story, said, "Better the deed, than the apathetic shrinking from the deed." She laughed a little oddly as she shook hands with him.

"'The Statue and the Bust,' is n't it?" she said. "I will read it again."

"Yes," he answered. "Good-night. Thank you for letting me come with you — even if you only wanted an escort."

She heard his tramp die away down the lane towards the Camp, and for the first time active regret seized her for the part she had played a year ago — not yet for her own sake, but for Cayley's.

"Why did n't I marry this man, and save him?" she thought suddenly. "If his destiny was marriage, why not me rather than that woman who is making his life hell. We were both free, drifting rudderless, as likely to take each other as any other two human beings in all the world. Yet by some mischance I was bound up in another interest, and thought of nothing but Jack Vibart, and Valentine Cayley did not realise my existence. So we missed each other, and I did not help as I might have done." She did not know that she had, indirectly, thrust him into his present disaster. In so far, the Gods were merciful.

Margery found the drawing-room alight and cosy; tea was awaiting her, and Crofton was sitting beside the little table, reading the evening paper. He put it down as she appeared.

"I began to think you were lost, and was coming to look for you," he said.

"Is n't Anthony in?"

"I have n't seen him."

"Well, I suppose he will turn up if he wants tea. I am sorry you were left to entertain yourself. We are a

neglectful host and hostess, I am afraid. Will you pour out the tea?" He was nearer the tray than she, and she had made a point of asking little familiar acts from him with the purpose of not allowing him to feel himself a stranger. He rose at once, however, and offered her his seat.

"I would rather you did. Let me hand the tea-cake!"

She laughed, and made tea for him in the friendly domestic fashion which he valued the more from his bachelor existence, without telling her so. "I stayed playing with Mrs. Drysdale's children," she said. "I want to introduce you to Mrs. Drysdale. She has asked us to dinner there on Friday, and we are to take some music."

"Are the children part of the entertainment?"

"No, most emphatically not. The Drysdales are people who never inflict their friends with their domestic belongings, unless they are specially requested to do so. You would hardly know that they had any children, until you were intimate there."

"What an uncommonly well-ordered household it must be!"

"I always thought it a reasonable household, more than anything else. I should like my own to be just like that, if I were a married woman with a nursery."

Crofton contemplated her from behind a piece of buttered tea-cake. She was really wondering, suppose that sudden fancy of hers had been true instead of the present tragedy of the case, whether she would have managed V. C.'s household as well as Mrs. Drysdale's. "There would be the lack of mean," she considered, "and the disadvantages always attacking a soldier's wife, but I believe it could have been done." Crofton could know nothing of the intensely private speculation behind the dreamy softness of her face. He also vaguely speculated in unknown domesticity for a moment.

"Well, was your house-hunting satisfactory?" she said, rousing herself.

"No, not entirely. The Newlands property I looked at, won't do. But I am half inclined to buy the Rosary."

"The Rosary! That old house with the beautiful garden on the Constantia Road? Yes, I know it. It is a lovely place, of course. But it would need a good deal of putting in order." She looked at him with some attention. He must be possessed of some capital to think of buying the Rosary. "And isn't it rather large for you?" she suggested, with some hesitation.

"If I settle in this neighbourhood, I don't want to buy a cottage. I might marry, and in any case I like a fair-sized house."

"Oh — yes." Madge felt rather nonplussed. "Well, it is a beautiful old Dutch house," she said cheerfully. "In some ways I like it better than Friedenhof. I hope you will let me come and see you furnish it, if you do take it."

"I should buy it, if I took it at all. Of course I meant to ask you to advise me about the furnishing. Women have better taste than men in those things. But I have lots of ideas."

"So have I," agreed Madge, amicably. "Oh, I hope you will take it! It will be delightful to get a chance of expressing myself in a nice house. I always think that people's characters come out more in the choice of furniture than anything."

He looked at her thoughtfully. "You would like to furnish the Rosary?" he said. "You can't think of any house you would like better?"

The remark held no significance to Madge, though after she had told him she did not think he could do better, he seemed to consider the matter settled, and spoke of the Rosary as almost certainly his. That he regarded its purchase as having any connection with her did not occur to her mind, in the light of his perfectly frank manner and friendliness towards her at all times. He was very friendly, almost confidential in



his relations with her, — a condition of things beyond Madge's power of judgment, her opinion of her own attraction to men having always hitherto been based on a certain degree of flirtation ; but a varied experience had taught Crofton to keep his thoughts and intentions to himself, and his was not a nature to be known in an hour. Apart from all this, Margery had grown to look upon herself as divided from other unmarried women by reason of Jack Vibart, and forgot that such division was not obvious to the rest of the world. She had for a time clung to the delusion that her feeling for Vibart was the utmost of which her nature was capable, and that she lived only upon the hope of seeing him the next year in England. But things had intervened to prevent the Professor carrying out his half formed scheme of going Home, and Margery found that in spite of her efforts she did not much care. Indeed it became gradually so uncontrollable a fact that her passion had died a natural death, that she could no longer deny it, even to herself, and regarded her past with wonder and some contempt. The connection with Vibart had been, after all, of so little importance to her that she could not regard it as the sacred thing she had wished. It had left her without a future, however. She could not look, even in the innermost recesses of her heart, to marriage as the goal and crown of her life — even as the conclusion of the present order of her circumstances. She had substituted a return to England as the turning point of her fortunes whenever she found it irresistible to look ahead. "Until I go Home again," she said when she wished to mark a period, as girls without her experience might have said, "Until I marry," however secret they might keep such hopes. But in general Margery Cunningham did not allow her thoughts to rest on the life prospect before her. The brevity of her love for Vibart had not only driven her into a distrust of herself

and her deeper emotions, but had caused her to cling more desperately to the little round of her days, and the things in the immediate present. She imbued herself with the shifting life of the neighbourhood, and made her interests in the events of one week to another, without even making plans so far ahead as next season.

Crofton went with Margery to Mrs. Drysdale's dinner, and they found themselves well entertained. The Mowbray boy was possessed of the susceptibility which goes with curly hair; in the short conversation space before dinner he waxed chatty with Madge, who was his partner, and whom he then met for the first time; during dinner he was attentive, but afterwards in the drawing-room she sang, and that completed his subjection. He could not bring himself to thoroughly appreciate Mr. Crofton's baritone, particularly in duets with Miss Cunningham, but he absorbed as much of her attention as possible to console himself, and left Crofton to his hostess, — the serenity with which that gentleman fell in with the arrangement leading Mowbray to the decision that he was after all a deuced good fellow.

"You must come and see me," Madge said in the friendly fashion peculiar to her. "I am having some tennis next week."

"Thanks, I should like it awfully!"

"And I will introduce you to all the prettiest girls."

"Will you? But I think I've begun very well already, you know!"

"Oh, who have you met? Have you seen Millie Hearne, or Kate Devigne, or the Hofman's, or Polly Harbord?"

"No, — but I have seen you, you know." He looked at her with honest admiration in his young eyes, and with the happy confidence of his years.

"Oh, how very nice of you!" Margery was laughing openly; the sound of it went across the room, and caused Crofton to turn from the music he was discussing with Mrs. Drysdale, and look at her.

"It isn't particularly nice," the boy said stoutly, — he was a delightful boy, — "I expect it's only what they all tell you!"

"It isn't, indeed! I never remember having such a wholesale compliment paid me before."

"Well, they all think it then. You can introduce me to any amount of girls, but I'm sure I've seen the pret—the best already!"

"I assure you, you are quite alone in your opinion," Madge was beginning, but she stopped suddenly.

"You know you are the prettiest girl about here!" A faint echo from the plumbago hedges of last year floated across her reluctant memory.

"At any rate I much appreciate your compliment," she substituted lightly for her unfinished speech. "Do you like Wynberg?"

"Yes, I should think it's a ripping place when you get into the hang of things. Mrs. Drysdale says you have jolly picnics in the summer."

"By moonlight, yes. Do you ride?"

"Rather! It's about the only thing on which I pride myself. I'm awfully vain over my riding."

"I hope it won't be the pride that goes before a fall. I can ride too!"

"Oh, will you?" he said promptly.

"What?"

"Ride with me, of course!"

"Miss Cunningham, will you sing this?" Crofton asked formally, from the further side of the room.

"What is it? — 'Lovelace'? Oh, I don't think — No, I would rather sing something else. That's too high."

"As you please!"

("I have annoyed Mr. Crofton," thought Madge, as she sat down to the piano and began to sing. "But it can't be helped. Why did I ever sing him 'Lovelace'? I hate the very sound of it! And I suppose it was my declining to sing it now that has upset him.")

("It is her innate vanity!" thought Crofton, whose temper often boiled unsuspected beneath the curb he put upon it. "She cannot leave any man alone — even that boy must be a victim to feed the fire! What a fool I am to think about it at all! Let her flirt — it is nothing to me.")

The Mowbray boy sat entranced, while Margery did her best to soothe Crofton by singing with great gentleness a little German song, which had the contrary effect of increasing his sense of injury, and of enslaving the already smitten subaltern.

"Moon, didst thou see my loved one  
Give me a kiss last night?  
Moon dearest, O believe me,  
I did not think it right!"

Oswald Drysdale, who generally filled the post of onlooker seeing most of the game, came out of his corner suddenly and went to talk to Mowbray, regardless of straying eyes and wide answers.

"Just come out from Home, have n't you?"

"No, I joined from India."

"Had a good time?"

"Pretty fair. Rather dull. Nothing but a few border skirmishes out of our reach. Wish there'd be a jolly big war! Promotion's awfully slow, — the Regiment wants thinning. There's no chance of it here, I suppose?"

"Read the papers!"

"They don't count for anything."

"That's exactly what I mean. It must come."

"Well, by Jove! we ought to lick them, because of Majuba."



"I don't say I think it just —"

"Oh, but we can't leave that not wiped out," said the boy, simply. "We must just lick them — I don't care what pretext we give. Isn't their Government corrupt?"

"Frightfully, but then they have an argument on their side. They never wanted us to overrun them as we have, and half the world talks about our policy of aggrandisement."

"Who wants their blasted country? Let's go and lick them, and then give it back again!"

"My dear fellow, we should have exactly the same trouble as now, if we did. It would not improve matters in the least. They would slip back into the old abuses."

"Oh, well, we could always go and lick them again!"

"The Duke's are a good old fighting Regiment," remarked Ossy, with a sigh. "But they do not teach their subs political economy as well as the traditions of the Army. Going, Miss Cunningham? Come into the other room, and have some whisky before you start, Crofton!"

"Are you staying at Vine Lodge?" Mowbray asked, as the whisky was dealt out, while Madge was gone to put on her cloak.

"Yes."

"What luck some fellows have!" Mowbray remarked to himself ingenuously.

He accompanied Crofton and Madge to their own gate, and marched off to Camp down the lane, whistling a bar of her last song.

"You appear to have made a conquest," remarked Crofton, disagreeably. "I will congratulate you — if you care for small game?"

"I think he's a dear boy! What's the matter, Mr. Crofton? You are speaking in a very nasty tone!"

"I am sure I beg your pardon, I should think my

tone was moderately immaterial, but if you would rather have my silence, you certainly shall."

"I really don't see why you should adopt this attitude," said Margery, nettled. "What on earth is it to do with you if I choose to talk to Mr. Mowbray, or he comes to call here?" She was so really astonished that it became evident in her voice, the surprise of which seemed to incense Crofton all the more.

"It is nothing whatever to do with me," he agreed, with an icy reserve that brought her first impression of him again to Margery's mind. "I beg your pardon for interfering."

They had reached the doorstep, and Margery was fitting the key into the lock. "I am afraid Anthony will have gone to bed," she said in a tone that betrayed nothing. "Will you care to smoke?"

"No, thank you. Good-night."

"You won't have some more whisky?"

"I had some with Drysdale, thanks. Good-night."

Without another word she closed the dining-room door and turned the key. Then she paused with her hand on the switch of the electric light. "If you will go upstairs, I will turn this off," she said.

"May I do it for you?"

"No, thank you. It would be more to the point if you went upstairs."

"Good-night."

"Good-night."

He walked to the foot of the stairs, — Margery stood patiently with her hand on the switch; she had not given him any other salutation beyond a slight bend of her head, nor did she look at him now. He put his foot on the bottom stair, hesitated, and suddenly crashed back to her across the hall, treading so heavily that she trembled for fear lest Anthony should wake. "What on earth made you flirt with that confounded boy?" he said, drawing his dark brows into a knotted

line and looking at her with the straight look she had said she liked. It was a very angry look just now.

"Oh," she responded coolly. "Is that it?" And then suddenly her sense of humour got the better of her indignation. "Mr. Crofton, please do not be so silly!" she said frankly. "I did not flirt with him — I laughed and talked as I always do. What is the use of glaring at me like a hero of melodrama? You have no right to lecture me —"

"I am not lecturing you. Only I don't like to see you making eyes at any man you may chance to meet like that, any more than I should my — my sister."

"I don't make eyes! How can you say so! I treated him exactly as I treat any one else — you, for instance. You don't suppose I am flirting with you, just because I am friendly?"

His eyes glinted with a queer half-savage expression. "By God! you had better not," he said below his breath.

Margery started, and stared at him harder than ever. "The Savage is coming to the top with a vengeance!" she thought. "He looks as if — as if — what? Oh, he must have had too much whisky!" But the quiver of her nerves belied the thought. Crofton was not drunk; but he was shaken out of his self-control and usual reticence, and a glimpse of real nature always upset and frightened Margery. She had identified herself so much with the shams of the light-hearted world round her, that to have the veil torn aside, as it had been once or twice before when she touched on ugly naked passion, was a disagreeable shock.

"I don't understand you," she said coldly, with an effort at recovery. "I am sorry if you thought I behaved as if I were carrying on a particularly vulgar flirtation, — which is the only way in which I can translate your extraordinary remarks! I had no idea of flirting with any one, — nor do I wish to discuss the subject further. Good-night!"

He stood on one side, slowly, still looking at her with frowning intensity. "I am sorry on my part if I spoke harshly," he said, with an air of lordly acknowledgement, that again roused in Madge a desire for hysterical laughter. ("He speaks as if he were conferring a vast favour!" she thought.) "Will you shake hands?"

"Oh, of course! Now, do please go to bed!"

She was so nervous that it required an effort to put her hand in his. He held it for a moment in a strong grip, then put her gently on one side, towards the stairs.

"I am going to put out the light for you!" he said, and she obeyed him in silence, and went up to her own room. As she turned at the head of the stairs, she glanced down at his motionless figure, waiting still in the hall below. He stood there until she had reached her own door before he involved the hall and himself in darkness, and then followed her quietly. She went into her room with drooping head before he had crossed the landing to his own.

It was a relief to Margery to find that Crofton had quieted down the next day, and was as she had always known him, a somewhat forceful, self-centred companion, but with no new or disturbing developments to alarm her. Their intercourse was a pleasant, easy affair as a rule, for they had many interests in common, and those subjects where they found themselves on different planes of thought, she avoided with feminine skill. "You must take men as you find them," said Margery, philosophically. She arranged her mental attitude to suit Crofton's, just as she did Drysdale's or Truman's when with them, with the result that Crofton fancied himself in more complete harmony with her than he really was. But that belief, however intimate they became, would probably never be shaken. If he discovered any lack of sympathy, he



would place the deficit on her side, not on his, and conclude that women could not always comprehend a man's point of view, without realising his own incapacity to comprehend a woman's. It was in the nature of things that Madge should know otherwise, but she knew also that there were moods of hers into which no created being, man or woman, could enter, however intuitive or in touch with her. This is a knowledge learned slowly, but not always fully recognised, for we all struggle against it, however strong our stoicism. That terrible saying of Emerson's, that souls never touch their object, is a truth which has driven more saints into Paradise than all the creeds. The realisations, however partial, of its loneliness, makes the human soul stretch out after an intangible Divinity, since the tangible around it is proved out of reach. My brother cannot understand me, — but I can assert a God, and setting him, an independent presence, in the far-off Heavens, I can take comfort in my faith that He does, just so long as I feel Him a personality sufficiently human to be a satisfactory confidant. Margery prayed to a dogmatical God apart from her convictions. When her nature was stirred to its deepest, when she knew that her soul stood lonely in a universe created in its own idea, then she did not pray. She felt without words, and experience was teaching her not to attempt expression. Crofton had his moods into which no one could enter also, but being the masculine and less complex animal, he accepted them as an established fact, and did not analyse or expect sympathy. Indeed, the isolation of his own individuality was to him merely a proof of a certain superiority, rather than a loss of fellowship with his kind. He had begun to like Margery Cunningham rather against his will, for he was keen-sighted enough to see that certain of her faults were hardly tolerable from his standpoint. Yet he continued to like her, and to be attracted by her best side, which was the

one he most frequently saw. Propinquity and opportunity, the twin powers that influence human nature most, were beginning to change the reluctant liking to something less capable of judgment. If Crofton had really wished to avoid such an influence he would, however, have left Vine Lodge after a few days, as he originally intended; but he lingered on from week to week, more conscious of his own motive than Margery, who was entrenching herself in an honest friendship, and was debarred from thinking of anything warmer, both by ties in the past and conscientious scruples of which Crofton could have no conception. Even the incident of Miles Mowbray, and Crofton's rabid hostility upon his subsequent visits, merely made her laugh, and roused her to no sense of the perils of the situation. She was happy, as ever, in the present, and with her acquired irresponsibility, would not look to any possible development.

## CHAPTER XII

*"Where is loss?  
Am I in Eden? Can another speak  
Mine own love's tongue?"*

JOEY TULLOCK'S luncheon party on board H. M. S. *Skate* comprised Mrs. Redmayne and Madge, Crofton, Valentine Cayley, and Polly Harbord. It was not long since he had been promoted to Commander of the little third-class cruiser, and he presided with much gold lace and affability in the tiny cabin at the stern of the ship. The hour's journey that lay between Simon's Town and Wynberg had prevented Madge from knowing as much of the naval side of social life as she did of the military; but she was always charmed afresh when she found herself within the cheery little colony in False Bay. There was more good comradeship, and even greater lack of ceremony, amongst the circle there than in the larger area of the suburbs round Cape Town. The tiny cottages up the cliff side were full of the wives of the naval men on the boats in the Bay, and the little station hummed with informal visiting and gaiety, while there was an innocent picnic air about the dining-out, and card parties, and scratch dances, which sprang up like mushrooms daily.

"We have been keeping it up this week!" Joey said as they sat at luncheon. "A dance on Monday, — sports Tuesday (I dined out that night, too, and played poker till two the next morning!), — three luncheon parties, — theatricals Thursday, and a gymkana on Saturday!"

"I always said you were far more frivolous here than

we are!" said Margery, gaily. "I have n't dined out since I went to the Drysdales last week, and I am sure Mr. Crofton thinks us very tame after Johannesburg!"

"Dear rustic town! do they still scratch each other's eyes out at the public functions there?" Cissie Redmayne asked. "I spent a week in Johannesburg once with my husband. We were doing the round tour, and came back by sea. I remember they began putting on their diamonds about twelve o'clock in the day (not earlier), and they offered us iced salmon — English salmon! — as a special attention. I took a long time to recover from that week!"

"I never attempted to sample the society to any great extent," said Crofton, indifferently. "I was outside the town, in Doornfontein, and found my distraction chiefly in the theatres and the halls."

"I am glad I don't live in commercial centres," said Madge, comfortably. "It must be so terrible! We have got quite the prettiest side of the life out here in the suburbs."

She glanced out of the porthole opposite her to the glimpse of the smiling bay and the curve of shore. Every time the *Skate* rolled a little in her moorings, a picture of dotted white houses and green hillside rose up, framed in the porthole, and with the return swing came the hollow blue sky without a cloud to mar it.

"Do you like a pretty life?" V. C. asked, turning to her. "It sounds like existence on a Christmas card!"

"It is very much more comfortable than the unfinished side of existence Up Country," said Margery, practically. "The Colony is only in the schoolboy stage inland, and is all elbows and knees and rude remarks!"

"It will grow — particularly if the Boers are no longer the schoolmasters!" said Mrs. Redmayne, significantly. "Shall we have war, Mr. Cayley?"

"Yes, if I am consulted!"



"It's a poor chance for us," grumbled Tullock. "Your service will get all the fun, and I don't believe we shall have a look-in! We're just jumping in our skins to get a pot at something. Look at the way the fellows tumbled to the Benin expedition! But we shall be held back next time, I am afraid."

"There is room for all!" said Crofton, briefly.

When luncheon was over, they went up on deck to leave the blue-jackets room to clear. Joey's dining-room was some twelve feet by ten at its broadest, and sloped to nothing at its farthest end; the round table and the guests pretty well filled it, and it required the alert deftness of naval training to avoid charging into the fern pots peacefully mounted in the empty spaces from which he had removed the guns, or backing into treasures gathered from the Seven Seas and strewn around the cabin. There was not much more space on deck, but the women disposed themselves in chairs, while the men leaned on the rails, and the world, as viewed from the trim gun-boat, looked a little space compact of sunshine, a blue bay, and a strip of shore with toy houses.

"How this thing does dance!" said Madge, laughing, as the *Skate* jogged merrily in the swell. "Oh, I am glad I have n't got to take a voyage in her! I am a terribly poor sailor. There is a line of Kipling's which always fills me with a giddy horror even to read —

"'The kick of the screw beneath me, and the round blue seas outside!'

Is n't it awful?"

"Is n't he a favourite of yours?" V. C. asked in his cross sympathetic voice. "I suppose women dislike him because he always hits their weak points!"

"What do you mean, Mr. Cayley? I am sure it is something nasty from the satisfaction of your tone!"

"Never mind my tone, listen to this —

“A fool there was, and he made his prayer —  
(Even as you and I!)  
To a rag and a bone and a hank of hair!’

That’s what you all are! Rags and bones and hanks of hair, and then men fall down and worship you.”

“I am sure I am not! Mrs. Redmayne, do come to the rescue! Mr. Cayley says I am an ill-dressed skeleton, and my hair is like tow. Yes, I know that is what you mean, Mr. Cayley, though you mask it under Kipling.”

“I don’t care for Kipling nowadays,” said Mrs. Redmayne. “He is so like the Salvation Army — when he is not banging on a drum, he is talking very loud about God.”

“I asked Mr. Ames if he told the truth about the Army,” remarked Polly. “He has been through the ranks, you know — Mr. Ames, not Kipling. He says it was as much truth as it was good for the Public to know!”

“When Ames is clever I always go and smoke,” remarked V. C., dryly. “It is the only thing to do with some men. Miss Cunningham, what are you thinking about? You have not spoken for three minutes.”

“That’s unusual for me!” said Madge, good-naturedly. “I was thinking that it would be nice to make things stand still sometimes. I don’t want to go back, —” her pause was no more perceptible than her shudder, — “but somehow I don’t want to go forward. Perhaps if I could be sure that I should remain the same mentally, I would not care about a physical change.”

“Mental experience is really the only experience with any power to change you,” said V. C., from the wilderness of a man’s ignorance.

“Do you think so?” returned Madge, quietly. “I am not a lover of change at any time. Once I am comfortably settled I don’t want to be uprooted.”

"I am sorry for that, for I am going to uproot you now," said Mrs. Redmayne, rising. "No tea, thanks, Mr. Tullock. It gets dark so early at this time of the year that I want to get back."

"Don't put your sunshade up in the boat going across, please!" Joey pleaded, "or we shall be hauled up by our Martinet. He is a very dragon on etiquette."

"Isn't that etiquette? It seems to me far more improper that I should have a freckled nose! But I remember his characteristic—Mrs. Thurston told me. He offered her his gig one day to take her out to call on Mrs. A'Court on the *Druid*, and it came on to rain. Mrs. Thurston looked at him, and said meekly, 'May I put up my umbrella, please?' He could n't say No, it was so wet, and then was seen the dread spectacle of the Martinet with a lady in his own gig, with an umbrella up. The whole Bay laughed over it."

"Serve him right for having theories. Good-bye, Miss Cunningham! Hope we shall see you on board again," and with a truly naval pressure of her hand, the new Commander helped his guest down the ladder and into the boat.

"What a jolly day we have had!" Madge said, as they went homewards. "I always wish I had belongings in the Navy after a visit to Simon's Town. They are such nice fellows!"

"We are a very harmonious party," Cissie agreed. "Do you like V. C.? I saw you talking to him."

"I have liked him for about six weeks," Madge said cordially. "He wants knowing."

"He used to be a great chum of mine, but I dropped him because my husband misapplied the situation," said Mrs. Redmayne, quietly. "V. C. is not very comprehensible to men, out of the saddle, and they do not understand his being so to women. It was very stupid

of Ned, but it was not worth hammering an explanation into his brain, so I sacrificed the acquaintance. I am always sorry over again when I meet V. C. He was one companion in a hundred."

"I have no husband, so I can continue to cultivate him," said Madge. Words sometimes slipped from her as easily as laughter, and she rarely paused to regret them. She and Crofton parted from Mrs. Redmayne at the Wynberg Station, and drove home to Vine Lodge. It was quite dark, and the electric lights gleamed like jewels along the lawless roads which maintained their air of being uncivilised after daylight, in spite of the gleaming lamps. Margery felt every rustle in the dark firs, and the beat of the pony's feet on the soft road sounded like an alarm signal. She did not notice Crofton's silence, or feel any presage of approaching Fate,—she was indeed rather glad of his presence in the nervous dusk. She shivered physically, but all her mental faculties were lulled with pleasant memories of the empty, happy day, and the easy society of people whom she knew so intimately that there was no conventional restraint possible between them.

It was nearly dinner-time when they reached home, and she changed her gown with her usual interest in her own adornment. It was a small daintiness that she loved, and she was as concerned over her personal appearance for the benefit of her brother and Crofton as she would have been for a dinner at Government House. There was a fire in the drawing-room, for the nights were very cold, and after dinner she and Crofton resorted thither, as they generally did while the Professor slumbered. Madge did not turn on the electric light as usual; there was a bright glow from the logs, and she sauntered over to the fire, and stood in front of it, glancing at herself mechanically in the mantel glass, and still without suspicion of the next



moment's crisis. Crofton followed her deliberately, and stood facing her as Vibart had done on the day that they parted.

"You said something to-day of which I want to remind you," he said. Margery turned from the glass and looked at him in some surprise; but she was accustomed to his way of taking her lightest speeches in deadly earnest at times, and resenting them as something personal. She generally laughed him out of it, and it hardly troubled her.

"Well, what was it?" she said.

"When you said on deck that you wished you could stand still, you did not want things to alter, you were referring to me?"

"To you!" she repeated blankly. "How could I be, Mr. Crofton? I was not thinking of you in the least."

"I thought you meant the condition of things between us," he said relentlessly. "You know as well as I do, that it cannot stop as it is. We must go on. There is no limit to the growth of feeling between a man and a woman. You cannot stay such a thing because you hesitate and wish to pause at one point."

"What do you mean?"

Her eyes met his across the firelight. The direct compelling gaze she had always recognised as a characteristic of his held her like a vice. "Do you mean—" she stammered. "Are you telling me— *What* do you mean?"

"Yes, that!" he said. It was plain he was controlling himself grandly. He did not come a step nearer, or attempt to reach her, yet his whole figure was tense with passion. "I—love you!" he said baldly. "You need n't be afraid—I won't touch you till you tell me I may."

But the few brief words had struck Margery into stony silence, as completely as if she had looked upon

the head of Medusa. If the ground had yawned suddenly at her feet, — if some horrible disaster had paralysed her with its unexpectedness, — she could not have been taken more unawares. Just as once before, the little light veil of trivial things that she had thrown over her life was wrenched aside to show her raw reality beneath. She stood there dumb, battling with the dread that at last she had to face the consequences of her own free-will, and in the pause he put her dread into words.

“Would you be afraid to be my wife? Have I spoken too roughly?”

Again she fought for words, and this time they came. “I cannot marry you. I am sorry that you should have thought of it,” she said with a coldness that sounded to her own ears hideous.

He drew his brows together, half in pain, half in the opposition with which he had met and overcome the misfortunes and disadvantages of his life hitherto. Margery’s breast rose and fell quickly with the terror of her own position. If he knew the truth! If he could only guess what the woman whom he wished to make his wife had already experienced! — for the first time she saw herself plainly as a living lie; it had seemed hitherto entirely her own secret, a phase in her existence for which she was responsible to no one but herself. Now, in a flash, she saw that she represented another thing than she had the right to represent in men’s minds. She was a possible wife to them, — she had set herself honestly apart from any such possibility in her own mind. And she could do nothing to warn them away from the mistake. Indeed, the dread of a guess being made as to her motive of refusal made her red and white by turns, and she glanced furtively at Crofton with a panic-stricken desire to soften her uncompromising words that he might not light upon their true meaning. But he had no slightest suspicion of

the jarring tumult in her mind, or her giddy sensation of disaster. There were not two yards between them, but the force which holds humanity separate and individual is mightier than thousands of miles. All he observed was that her fair soft face was rather grave as she stood looking down into the red coals. Her mind was as secret from his as if they inhabited different spheres.

"I have never thought of you as anything but a friend," she said with an effort to keep her voice steady that was piteous. "I am very, very sorry if I have caused you any — any disappointment; but you have really taken me absolutely by surprise."

"You mean that you don't care for me," he said abruptly.

"Yes," she said catching at the excuse with relief.

"I am sorry to have troubled you — as I can see I have!" he said after a breath. "Will you still look upon me as a friend? It seems rather hard that because I wanted more, I should lose even that that I had. Please forget what I — what I said, and we will let everything be as it was before."

She drew a sigh of relief that was almost a sob, and willingly laid her hand in the one he held out. He clasped it for a moment closely, and then loosening his hold he bent his head and kissed it with a certain air of reverence that made her heart throb with absolute pain. It struck her vividly that she had never before been treated with such absolute respect, and a woman, however much she may be carried away by a display of less restrained feelings, likes to meet with respect some time in her life, and prizes it jealously.

"Yes, we will be just the same as before," she said mechanically; but she knew in her own mind that it could never be the same as before. Moreover the disturbing of the calm serenity with which she regarded their relations to each other, had raised a new fear in her mind. She thought with panic dread that this

might have happened at any time, — with Truman, with Forrester, with any of the men she had known intimately. As if her eyes were suddenly opened, she saw the danger lurking round her at every step, while she had gone gaily on, treading at the edge of a precipice. Supposing there had been nothing in the way of these men marrying, as there was nothing in Crofton's, — no question of means, or family ties (she guessed hurriedly at possible barriers with which she had never concerned herself), this terrible facing herself in the hard light of the World's opinion might have come upon her at any moment. It had not seemed until now a very serious thing that she had done, — she had comforted herself with the poor excuse that like stories were hinted of half the women she knew. They might be just as true, — according to Vibart's creed it was an amiable weakness, too general to count as a crime. Sometimes, on looking back, she felt as if she had assisted at a tragedy, through which she had always heard the band play. There had been ludicrous incidents which had appealed to both hers and Vibart's sense of humour, and she had even laughed over them in remembrance. The only thing from which she had shrunk had been the after-realisation of vulgarity; but she had put it out of her mind as a thing which was done and could not be helped, and it had not troubled her careless ephemeral life with more than a passing cloud. On the whole, her fault had been a trivial experience which she could hardly call by so hard a name, in the light of Vibart's teaching. Now the strength of its result, the influence it was to have upon all her future, loomed up suddenly, and she cowered, aghast at such a spectre of her past self.

It was an uneasy evening Margery turned on the electric light, and they had some music. But even the matter-of-fact lighted room, which with her faith in material details she had hoped would dispel the firelit



atmosphere of the last half hour, could not bring back her old security. Crofton was more at his ease than she; he was much as usual, and while she congratulated herself on his taking her decision so tractably, she saw nothing ominous in his acquiescence. But though she went to bed early, she endured the most unusual torture, for her, of a broken night, and hour after hour her defenceless conscience faced whole armies of accusations which had never attacked it before. In that first experience of retribution, she suffered perhaps more than at any after time; for she was taken unawares, and had prepared no argument in her own extenuation.

## CHAPTER XIII

*"Choose one of whom your grosser make" —  
(God in the Garden laughed outright) —  
"The true refining touch may take  
Till both attain to Life's last height."*

THE return of the Dodds was the herald of quite a burst of festivity in the neighbourhood. Johnnie had taken his wife and daughter Home in the preceding summer, — that is, in December, — and six months' absence has made Wynberg think that it could hardly do without him. He was large in every sense of the word, and he left a large hole behind him when he pranced out into the world from his own particular corner of it.

"Had a ripping time!" said Johnnie, his high voice squeaking with enthusiasm. "Damned old country, England, and slow, but there 's everything ready to your hand. You can have a new suit of clothes by pulling a bell, and there 's always a means of conveyance waiting round the corner."

"Dad never would walk a step, — it was awfully bad for him. Don't you think he is visibly stouter?" Starling said to Madge. "We had a very good time. What have you been doing here?"

"Oh, the usual round! I am so glad that you are back, Star! I missed you awfully. So did True."

"Oh, True!" Starling lifted her chin. "He was inconsolable for a fortnight, I suppose, just as a picturesque attitude. And then you consoled him!"

"Well, I did my best!" Madge admitted. "But I have n't seen so much of him lately, somehow. We 've had a man staying in the house —"

"Poor True!" said Starling, rather dryly.

"True did n't care — you know he never does."

This was a comfortable maxim, and worthy of all belief in her mind. "He used to come and help entertain. He has n't been lately, because the Duke's have gone out to Simon's Town. Isn't it a pity!"

"Yes," said Starling. "I suppose so — for some of us. Is Mr. Forrester back yet? We rather hoped he would come in the same boat with us."

"Yes, his leave was up in April — he has been back some time. Oh, they've got a new boy, Starling, and he is quite a success, much more so than that last Henderson thing whom Silence Wright and the Drawler used to torment. This boy joined from India, and is not entirely callow! He is a great friend of mine, and I was very sorry when he was moved to Simon's Town. He used to warn off about three times a week and dine with us, and the Colonel got quite stuffy over it! It was such fun."

"What is his name?"

"Miles Mowbray — every one knows him as the Mowbray boy. He is deliciously impertinent! What do you think he said because I went over to Simon's Town once and lunched with Joey Tullock at the Hotel?"

"I wonder Simon's Town did n't say something! Well?"

"He said Anthony did n't look after me properly, and if he were in charge he should be much more strict! I did laugh so! He is such a dear boy you can't be cross; but was n't it cool?"

Madge was talking quickly, instinctively shrinking from a question she knew must come, and hoping to distract Starling from her brief remark about "A man staying with them." But Starling had a tenacity of her own, and a motive for inquiry.

"Who is this man you said was staying with you, Madge?" She nearly said, "Who cut out True?" but refrained.

"Oh, a Johannesburger whose acquaintance An-

thony made Up Country ages ago. His name is Crofton, and he is rather nice," said Madge, with scrupulous care not to overstep the truth on either side in her description.

"A Johannesburg man! I wonder if Dad knows him?"

"I don't think so, he has not lived at Doornfontein long. He is well off, and has bought the Rosary."

"Oh, is he settling here?"

"I suppose so."

"Is he married?" said Starling. Her soft expressive eyes dwelt on Margery thoughtfully.

"No! — he will do nicely for Polly Harbord, or — you!"

"Or you!" retorted Starling.

"No, I am too devoted to the Mowbray boy!"

Starling laughed, "Bring Mr. Crofton to be inspected, if you like," she said. "Oh, I forgot to tell you, Madge, we met Mr. Livingston in London."

"No! did you? How is he? I hope you gave him my love! Is he coming out again?"

"I don't know. He was very amusing as usual, and we went about with him a good deal. He gave us tea at the New, and wanted to take me to dinners at restaurants innumerable. He said that London was the place *par excellence* to do as one liked, if one only had the moral courage!"

"I suppose he meant immoral courage. How like Beau! Did you go?"

"No, Mother was against it, and I did n't much want to."

"So he told you that you had no moral courage, I suppose?"

"Well, no, I appropriated the other part of his statement, and explained that I *was* doing as I liked in declining the invitation! He said he wished you had been there — you would have enjoyed yourself so thoroughly."



"I certainly should, and I should have done all the wicked things he asked me, so it is just as well that I was not. I'll bring Mr. Crofton round to-morrow, if I can catch him, Starling. He is very busy just now buying land round Constantia. He is taking up wine farming as a hobby, I think, as he has retired from business."

"What was he?"

"Oh, a perfect procession of trades! He told us the other night, and made us laugh. He was farming when Anthony knew him, and he came out as an engineer. He has tried ostriches, and at one time he ran a Hotel Up Country. He says that paid him best, because there was n't another within sixty miles, so he charged what he chose! I fancy he made money over that, and speculated at Johannesburg, and was fortunate."

"The real achievement was leaving off speculating when he had made money! They so seldom do. I wonder he could resist losing it again!"

"You would n't wonder if you knew him. He is the right sort of person to succeed. What portion of him is n't iron will, seems to be dogged persistence."

Margery had some cause for her point of view with regard to Crofton, for her dismayed senses were slowly and surely realising how very far he was from the quiet acceptance of her refusal on which she had at first congratulated herself. The few days which he had originally mentioned as the limit of his stay had lengthened into a few weeks, and still he showed no hurry to depart. Worse still, the Professor seemed quite resigned to his presence, and did not even hint at his leaving, which hampered Margery still further,—if her brother made his guest welcome, she could not raise an objection. It was she who had, in the first place, insisted on his being invited,—a fact of which the Professor would stormily remind her, as she knew, if she suggested that Crofton was in the way when he found his

company congenial in the slightest degree. Yet she really wished he would go, — his presence distracted her, and made an undercurrent to the smooth flow of her surface life of which she hardly dared to think. The more she considered the matter seriously, the more she was convinced that marriage was out of the question for her, and she must not even listen to a suggestion of it. "At least, not for years," added her elastic nature, prone to recover itself in time, however severe the fall. But in Crofton's case it was certainly out of the question, — a fact she tried vainly to impress on him without putting it into words, and which he met with an equally wordless but flat denial. The worst of it was, that she felt, uneasily, how he was making himself a place in her life, and that in consequence she must suffer keenly when he dropped out of it. Margery was very feminine, — she liked small attentions, she liked to be approved, and to read pleasure and admiration in the eyes that looked at her, and she liked above all to know that she was the first consideration in somebody's mind. They were just the little things that she prized the more for having to go consistently without them in her dealings with her brother. It was in instinctive search of such domestic courtesies — the mental sunshine in which to warm herself — that she had been driven into Vibart's snare. But on the whole, she did not want a violent demonstration of feeling so much as the little civilities of everyday life. In the first flush of her vitality, she had met and responded to the passion of the moment, but it did not attract her more matured nature. The gentleness of Crofton's iron self-restraint made his very touch pleasant to her, and she realised how dear his silently promised tenderness would have been — and yet she must not accept it.

"I shall suffer — but I suppose I deserve to suffer," she said to herself with hardening mouth and shrink-

ing senses. Then the old plea of Womanhood rose to her mind, "Why should the man come off scot free, and the woman take all the penitence? If Jack's wife died, he would be regarded as an eligible bachelor, — no one would dream of raising his past sins against him! It is only I who must pay the penalty for us both."

She had her fits of remorse too, during which the feeling that she was deceiving Crofton, as the typical Man who looked upon her as a possible wife, made her feverishly anxious to atone in some sort by forfeiting her chance to such a position. She introduced him to half the girls she knew, and tried to sing their praises honestly in his ears, and to forward the affair, if he showed the least sign of being attracted. With Starling he was soon firm friends, somewhat to Madge's surprise, and she heroically did her best to throw them together and shut her eyes and ears to her own growing reluctance. Crofton seemed in this case not unwilling; he found points of mutual interest with Mr. Johnnie, and was made free of Friedenhof, and Margery scourged herself mentally for her resentful acceptance of the fact that he often called there without her, and did penance by inventing errands and messages for him to leave with Starling.

"I cannot go to Friedenhof this afternoon," she said deliberately, after a hard-fought battle with her own jealousy. "Mrs. Cromo Dame is coming to tea. But I do want that book returned."

"Where is it?" he said with alacrity. "I am going down to the Rosary to see how they are getting on, and I can call on my way back."

"Here it is —" She held out "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" to him bravely. "Will you tell Starling that I liked it — very much."

"Did you?" he said turning the pages. "Ah! I remember it now — do you think she was right to marry that prig?"

Margery drew a long breath. The similarity of her position with Tess's had struck her, of course; also its essential dissimilarity in the one redeeming point, that in her own case no one knew or could prove her guilt — indeed, as far as she knew, it had gone unsuspected by the world around. "I think — having married him — that she should never have told!" she said, avoiding the real drift of his question. "She should *never* have told, — that is just where the weakness of the uneducated classes comes in. Had she been Angel Clare's social equal, she would not have made such a mistake."

"You think that education induces deceit?"

"I think it sometimes eliminates utter folly! What good did it do either of them that she told him? It proved him a cowardly hypocrite, and ended in a tragedy for her! There, go away — I don't want to discuss Tess with any one. I *felt* the book too much."

He laughed a little at her apparently causeless pettishness, and turned away with the book in his hand. At the door he hesitated, and then deliberately came back to her.

"I am sorry to re-open a subject which I know you wished closed," he said in a different tone. Margery started and glanced up at him with fear quickening the expression of her eyes. "I only wanted to ask you — was your objection to me based on another preference?"

"You mean — is there any one else?"

"I mean has another man been before me?"

"No!" she said deliberately, and her pulses throbbed to the shock of her own lie.

"Thank you. Then it is only that you don't care for me?"

"Yes."

"That is, of course, an insuperable barrier!" he said.



She did not look up, or translate his tone in any way. Her fair soft head was bent over the paper she was reading, and she merely said, "Yes!" again. Then he turned and went in earnest.

As the door closed behind him, she turned with a curious stiff motion and watched him, out of the window, walking away in the sunshine. Not until he was out of view, did she suddenly bury her face in the cushions behind her and tremble with the passion of her own feeling.

"He is going to her! — he asked me again to be quite sure — to have it off his conscience that he changed without cause. Now he is going to Starling — and I can't be glad! Oh, I can't be glad! — I am only *jealous* — miserably, meanly jealous, because I can't have what she can — and it is all my own fault!"

She sat up, and clasping her small strong hands behind her head, set her teeth, staring out before her with miserable wide-open eyes, bluer than the gay plumbago hedges, as blue as the hot African sky. Ten minutes later she got up and shook herself with a little fierce movement. Then she went upstairs to change her gown, mindful that Mrs. Cromo Dame was coming, — she had asked her purposely to provide an excuse for not going herself to Friedenhof.

When the widow was shown into the drawing-room, one rustle of silk and breath of heavy scent, she found Margery sitting by the pretty tea-table, which was drawn up to the fire. The afternoon had turned cold and cloudy, as it does in August after the most brilliant mornings, and the wind sounded like artillery among the firs.

"It is blowing in a filthy fashion!" Blanche Cromo Dame said as she kissed her hostess. She had a shrewd, cordial liking for Margery, to which the latter had of late responded. "How cosy you look! I am quite thankful to get indoors. It must be awful in Cape Town — rocks blowing about!"

"The only thing to be thankful for is that it won't rain so long as this wind holds. Do loosen your furs, Mrs. Cromo Dame, — you will take cold driving home."

Blanche threw off her wraps and stretched out her plump pointed fingers to the fire. She had very pretty hands, with pink palms and filbert nails ; but they could never have belonged to an immaculate woman. They were the hands of a courtesan, though she were openly proved to have just passed through the marriage ceremony.

"What pretty biscuits ! Did you get them at Dix's ?" she said. "I was there yesterday, and they never showed me anything as toothsome."

"No, my cook makes these, under strict superintendence ! By the way, has Mrs. Savage Smith got a girl yet ?"

"Mrs. *who* ? Oh, you mean Mrs. Fierse-Jones. That was Mr. Forrester's joke, was n't it. What a smart boy he is ! You know he called me the Hand-painted Lady when he first came out ?" Blanche was not reticent.

"I heard it — you are very good-natured to take it as you do ! I wonder any one repeated it to you."

"Lilla Montfort, — Mrs. Cayley, I mean, — let it out in one of her — on one occasion. Oh, my dear, I don't mind ! Better look pretty than plain. A pretty picture is better than an ugly dull canvas any day. Don't you think so ?"

"I certainly always admire you !" Blanche always succeeded in amusing Madge, whatever her mood. "But I never tried, myself — I thought I should hate the feeling so much."

"It depends on what you use. I'll show you how to do it, if you want to ; but you're young enough to do without it yet. Poor Cromo used to call it my tar and feathers, and boasted that I was a dab of a hand at private theatricals. He never minded. It's every-

thing in life to get hold of a man who does n't rag you for the sake of a little powder ! ”

“ I ’ll bear that in mind if I — if I ever marry ! When he goes down on his knees I ’ll say, ‘ First, may I use a powder-puff ! ’ ”

Blanche looked at her with some curiosity in her sleepy brown eyes. “ Dr. Langdon once told me that he could n't stand a greasy skin of all things ! ” was all she remarked, however. “ ‘ Let them put the whole powder-box on their faces, but don't let them be shiny ! ’ he said. I said, ‘ How about a mouthful of powder ? ’ He said, ‘ A man takes his chance ! If he ’s such a fool as to miss his goal, and get out of boundary, he must suffer. Personally I don't know the taste of powder, but I ’ve sampled plenty of lip-salve ! ’ Smart, was n't it ? ”

Madge gave a little shriek of laughter ; Mrs. Cromo Dame's conversation was apt to act on her like champagne, and went to her head in the effort to follow its intricacies.

“ By the way, where ’s your new man ? ” Blanche said suddenly.

“ Gone out.”

“ With your brother ? ”

“ No, I don't know where Anthony is.”

The heavy-lidded, full-coloured brown eyes dwelt thoughtfully on the fire for a minute. “ You don't know much about him, do you ! ” Blanche said quietly. “ I ’d look him up now and then if I were you. Not that it matters in the end. Where ’s Crofton gone then ? ”

“ He went to the Rosary to see how the house is getting on — ”

“ Does he mean to get in yet awhile ? ”

“ I don't know. He was going to call at Friedenhof on his way back.”

“ Oh ! — Starling Dodd ? ”

"I daresay."

Mrs. Cromo Dame leaned back in silence for a minute, with her eyes still on the fire. In the pause the wind thundered, and the sudden darkness came down like a curtain over the day, which almost seemed to turn to night visibly. Then she spoke :

"Look here, Madge, I'm going to give you a word of advice out of my own experience. You can resent it, if you like, but you need n't. Don't be a fool over this man. Any one can see that he is after you, and you could have him for very little trouble, I should say. Don't let him drift off to Starling, if you like him yourself. He's a good type of man to marry—well-off, and sound, and considerate, I should fancy. You won't come across that sort every day, and you'd better marry while you can. You're not the kind of girl to dawdle until you go begging, and brag it out like Polly Harbord might do. If she does n't marry, she'll never be an old maid,—she'll attract men when she is fifty, and that's a hard age. She can use her tongue. But you're not built that way. You're not offended, are you?"

"No, I know you mean it kindly. It would have been easier not to have spoken. But—I don't think—I shall marry—Mr. Crofton."

"If you don't Starling will, or some one else. And you'll have to stand by and see her living the life and having the position you might have had. You can't get away from it here—we're all too intimate. And then, if you regret it, you'll begin to pick holes in her and pity him, and he, if you once attracted him, will probably come back to you—they generally get a re-action. You'd better take him now, than go playing the fool after he's married some one else."

"But supposing—"

"There is n't another man, is there? I don't believe it! True was a bit gone over you, but you never were on



him, or V. C. either, though you could make a bad business worse in that quarter, I don't doubt. If you are hesitating over past flirtations, put them clean behind you — they don't count. A woman has as much right as a man to start clear. What wild oats she sowed before she knew him are no more to him than his to her."

Margery felt rather breathless. The sudden introduction of V. C. and True, as other than mere pleasant acquaintances who had just "liked her," gave her the old shock of fear that they also might look upon her as something she was not and could not be. And the final summing up of Blanche's modern philosophy filled her with apprehension lest her words had a direct application, and at the same time dazzled her with a blaze of possible redemption. If one could think that this was true! — if women really might repent as men and put their former sins behind them without the outward and visible signs of a sheet and a candle, — then indeed her tempest-tossed doubts and questionings might subside in quiet rest and accomplished happiness, or so she fancied.

"Well, I must be going," Blanche said, without waiting for an answer. She stretched herself like a tigress, and raised her soft lissom body out of the easy chair. "You can think over what I say, Madge; the best news I had heard for many a long day would be of your engagement, and my congrats would be the heartiest you would receive. Good-bye," — she stooped and offered Madge a mouthful of the powder which Dr. Langdon avoided sampling. "Ah! Here's your brother. Well, Mr. Cunningham, I'm just going, you're too late. Are n't you sorry?"

But she did not go at once, because the Professor stood on the hearthrug talking to her, a well-groomed figure in his well-fitting riding-dress, and the conversation continued on the doorstep, to which he accompanied her, and where they stood to chat. Margery knew he

liked smart women, but the circumstance would have struck her even then as miraculous if her thoughts had not been absorbed by her late guest's counsel. In spite of the wind, the Professor, with his coat-collar turned up round his ears, lingered over a rapid conversation with Blanche, while his sister sat in the firelight seeing the figure of blind Justice in the gleaming coals, and watching the scales dip now on this side, now on that. When he came back into the warm room, shivering a little, for he was a delicate man, she was still there, but his rapid scowling glance at her face showed him nothing but dreamy absorption.

"Are n't you going to dress, Madge? It is growing late!" he said warningly. There was a note of rebuke in his voice on the principle of carrying the war into the enemy's country and attacking her before she could accuse him of lingering himself.

"Is it? I will go in a minute."

He glanced at her again, snarled an indistinguishable word, and went off to the dining-room to drink neat whisky as a preventive against a chill. Margery sat on, until the howling of the wind drove her into action. As an accompaniment to her thoughts it was intolerable; she hated it at all times, but now it made her want to shriek in concert. She dressed for dinner, and then sat down to the piano and sang to drown the howling demon outside, trying not to count the long hours that Crofton must be spending at Friedenhof. Did he mean to *dine* there? Was he not coming back until late? Had he the discourtesy to —

His step at last — she caught it on the gravel in the pauses of Heaven's artillery, — a firm, decided step that she had learned to know. She heard him ring the door-bell sharply, and the maid answering it: "A rough night, Mary!" he said. "Yes, Sir," — on ordinary occasions Margery would have gone to let him in herself, but she had purposely not done so, and did

not wish him to lose the point of her action. So she began to sing, in order to announce her presence in the drawing-room, and the fact that she must have heard him ring. It was the "Lover's Lullaby" —

"Sings the Starling,  
' Kiss thy darling !'  
While the dove doth bid us love !"

An odd recklessness had taken possession of her. She thought of Blanche's suggestion that she would have to stand by and see his life with Starling, — all the things she might have had, and deliberately renounced ; she wondered how it would affect her, and tried to look at it in all its details, trying the pain beforehand, as one moves a wounded limb to find which position is the most endurable. Then she heard Crofton pause at the door, and he entered.

" Oh !" she said carelessly, leaving off her song, but not rising. " How late you are ! "

" Am I? Time flew rather. By Jove, I am late ! I had no idea — Hope I sha'n't keep dinner waiting ! " He turned again to the door, and then spoke as he opened it, " Starling sent her love to you, — she is coming over to the Rosary to-morrow to see the place."

Margery's mouth was dry. "*Starling!*" she repeated blankly.

" Oh — Miss Dodd ! Sorry, but you always speak of her so. It's catching."

" Oh — of course."

" I thought we would ride down and meet her there."

" You can anyway. I believe I have to go to Cape Town."

She did not know that she could be so angry. The strength of her jealousy overwhelmed her for the moment. At any cost she felt that she must regain what she had already lost. Her hands fell from the

keys, and she jumped up and crossed the room to the fireplace.

"What a long time you were out!" she said unsteadily. "Mrs. Dame left long ago — I've been — I've been — all alone."

She heard the door close, and for the minute she thought he had gone. Then he came back across the room and stood beside her — waiting.

"It was n't nice of you!" she whispered. "I wanted you."

"Well?" he said. She realised that he would not speak first, and looked up with shining eyes which were full of fear of herself. She seemed to have lost control. All her carefully erected barriers of reason, and conscience, and determination, behind which she had entrenched herself, had fallen about her in ruins. And yet she had fought not weakly, and with desperate appeals to some vague God, beyond herself, for help.

"I always want you!" she said inaudibly, and turned her face against his breast, as though she hid from her own defeat.

"My darling!" he murmured, in a voice he had never let himself use as yet. "I can never thank you properly, but I love you better than anything on earth!"

An echo out of the past repeated almost the same words to her shuddering, reluctant memory, — nay, as their lips met, the sting and stain of other kisses seemed to prevent her realising the bliss of these. And so was her betrothal sealed, — for she came to him not fresh with mortal ignorance, but with the terrible gift and gain of a God, "knowing good and evil."



## CHAPTER XIV

*"To love the right things rightly; this enspheres  
Wisdom, religion, art; forges the key  
That opens Edens through the Gate of Tears,  
Where by life's river blooms the mystic Tree."*

THE new elderly Colonel of the Duke's, who the Regiment asserted was being finished off in Africa, was an authority on etiquette; on Guest night his officers must be present to a man, or he would know the reason why; indeed Forrester declared that no excuse would be accepted save a broken neck or a railway accident, in which cases the ghost would have to appear and satisfy the Chief for the absence of the body. On other nights it was sufficient to warn off, but woe to the man who omitted the ceremony!

It was not even very safe to be late; Mr. Henderson was late to-night, and the Colonel glared. The Junior Subaltern fell into his seat apologetically, and attacked his meal at once. He was a round-faced youth with a roseate colour, and when agitated it matched his Mess jacket nicely.

"You *have* done it!" muttered the Drawler, who was on Henderson's right. "Where've you been?"

"Calling on Mrs. Naseby. She kept me, gossiping old cat! Heard some news, though."

"No! What's up?"

"That brute Forrester has been refused! I *am* glad!" Mr. Clive Forrester had not endeared himself to his juniors. He was better off than most of his fellows, and Senior Sub. His ways in the Regiment were apt to rouse annoyance to frenzy, and to make those who were not strictly his associates disgusted critics of a little way he had of currying favour. Now

you may pursue a sinful career in the Army, it seems, and do many questionable things; but you are open to a wholesale fire of scrutiny and comment, and the man who toadies is briefly labelled as a loathsome beast.

"Who is it? Edith Hofman, of course. I never thought she would have him!" The Drawler was wise after the event. "Did Mrs. Naseby tell you? It's sure to be a lie —"

"No, it is n't. He's so awfully sick he's gone off to mope. Fancy Pete moping!"

The Drawler glanced round the table; Truman, Tennyson, Cayley, Ames, Scott Murray, Wright, — they stretched away from him, a red line of flesh feeders. No, now he came to look, Clive Forrester was wanting.

"By Jove! I had n't noticed," he acknowledged. "Then it must have been on Thursday, after Johnnie Dodd's dinner. I was there. Forrester went off with her into the glass houses, and I suppose his dinner egged him on. Look sharp, Henderson, we're a course ahead."

The boy choked, and pushed his plate away. "I'm not hungry," he said. "I've got some more news."

"Oh, lord! Give it us by degrees. Any more of us wasting our maiden affections? Yourself, perhaps."

"Not I." Henderson grinned. He had learned to grin his way through chaff during his initiation in the Duke's. Africa had tanned, and his brother Officers had hammered him, into hardness. They let him alone now, save for an occasional burst of high spirits, and he concentrated his mind upon his uniform until it almost fitted.

"It's such a bore being all out here," he said confidentially. "One never hears any of the Wynberg or Rondesbosch news. Mrs. Naseby waxed great this afternoon. Miss Cunningham's engaged."

"The deuce!"

Henderson looked knowing. He had heard enough, on his first coming out, to locate the drift of Ransom's expletive. "Yes, she would n't have hooked a native of these parts," he said with an assumption of blasé worldliness that sat oddly on his fresh young face. "It's a fellow who's only just come down here — Crofton. He knows nothing of the neighbourhood and its stories a year since."

"Look here," — Ransom had recovered himself, — "don't you let Mowbray or Truman hear you talking like that. They are both friends of hers. Never mind what you think you know, you'd better shut your mouth about this affair."

"But half the Regiment knows that Major —"

"Never mind the Regiment. You take my advice. Shut your mouth. Get up, there's the Queen!"

Mowbray was seeing the guard turned out that night. After the toasts he swung out of the room, wrapped himself in his overcoat, jammed his cap down over his eyes, and stamped out into as bad a night as well could be. The wind howled, and a sheet of large rain pelted in his face. He shook his head bravely, like a dog, and went through his duty doggedly, but he was not sorry when it was over, and he could return to the Mess for the chance of a game of whist.

When he got back to the Mess most of the older men had left; the Drawler was alone to keep order among the Subs, and acted as referee in the cock-fight which was taking place between Scott Murray and Ames. Murray's weight stood him in good stead, but Ames was more active, being chiefly composed of well set bones and perfectly trained muscles. The Drawler called, "Time!" and amidst a shriek of laughter the two sat still, facing each other, and panting for a minute from the effort of rolling, and twisting, and squirming their toes beneath those of their adversary, as best they

could. Mowbray had stood still to look at them and shout too, — he was a regular boy; as he turned away he heard 'Silence' Wright say shortly to Tennyson, "Is it true?"

"I don't know. I suppose so. Henderson told Ransom; he has been calling on that female Inquisition incarnate, Mrs. Naseby. I think it very likely."

"Who is the man?"

"This fellow named Crofton who is staying with them. It is very probable. After all a few stories don't fatally injure a girl's character. Miss Cunningham may have been a little fool in our opinion, but there's nothing to prove."

Silence nodded shortly. "I was away on leave most of the time," he said. "What was the tale? The Tracker rode with her?"

"Oh, well, it was n't only that. He was there morning, noon, and night — especially night! Her brother went to Grahamstown, and then there was a lot of talk."

"Forrester made most of it. You can't trust what he says."

"He was in with Vibart, though."

"Yes, and blackguarded him behind his back more than any one. To his face it was all honey. 'Won't you have a drink, Major? Glad to see you back, Sir.' Then the instant the Tracker was out of hearing he called him a simple Woman-hunter, and said he was a disgrace to the Regiment!"

"All that does n't disprove Vibart's penchant for Margery Cunningham. It was undeniable, and considering what we know of Vibart —"

"It never choked True off! He has been there since as much as ever, if not more."

Mowbray heard, he could not help hearing, and his heart turned sick within him, while he wondered what this slur was on dear, pretty Madge Cunningham. He



had come to Wynberg too late to hear of it, for it had been displaced by fresher scandals in the minds of the men; but he could not take the comfort to himself that it was only idle talk in the mouths of Tennyson and Wright, as he would have with Forrester and Scott Murray. He was to hear it many times in the days which followed, and to have the details recalled and accentuated by empty heads eager for distraction of any kind. Furthermore, he learned to prove his loyalty in the stress of a secret pain that he bore in silence, and to face an overwhelming majority with a sturdy, "I don't believe a word of it!" that never faltered. "Any girl so pretty as Miss Cunningham has enemies. She is allowed a lot of licence — that's her brother's fault; but I believe she's as good, and honest, and straight a little girl as I would wish my sister to be!" His championship comforted himself at any rate.

Madge's engagement was talked threadbare for a week, and then dropped into the sphere of things established, and accepted as such. She had her champions beside Mowbray, if need be, — Valentine Cayley, Major Yeats, True, the Dodds, Cissie Redmayne, and the Drysdales; but most of these were wise in keeping silence and leaving things to settle themselves. Madge herself never guessed at the drift of the gossip; she had no idea as yet of any breath of scandal against her; but, of course, people would discuss her — one always discussed the principal parties in an engagement. She hoped they would be charitable, and that she should come off well. She said as much to Clarice Drysdale one afternoon when her friend came over to talk with her. It was a mild afternoon, after a week of stormy weather, and warm for the time of the year. Madge and Clarice took the basket chairs out onto the stoep, and basked in the sunshine as in a foretaste of summer. It was the beginning of September, and the promise of spring was already in the air.

Clarice settled herself with her feet upon the foot-rest, and prepared to talk luxuriously.

"You know, of course, what I have come for?" she said calmly. "I have come to discuss your engagement. It is what everybody is doing for miles round, so we may as well do it too. Besides there is something rather quaint in really criticising such a situation with the principal party concerned."

"Yes, I suppose they will talk," said Madge. "I hope they'll let me off easily. I am rather a good sort on the whole, don't you think, Clarice?"

"I wonder what they will say of Mr. Crofton! He shuts himself up in himself so much that he gives one the aggravated feeling that one is always left outside!"

"Mind you tell me if you hear! It would be so amusing. Clarice, were you surprised?"

"No, not entirely. You see when a man and a woman are staying under the same roof with each other, it is probable that they will drift either into brother and sister, or husband and wife. If Adam and Eve had n't had Eden to themselves, it is extremely probable that Adam would merely have said that Eve was a nice smart little girl — knew how to dress, (fig leaves!) — and Eve would have remarked that Adam was a dear good fellow, but not at all the kind of man she could marry. Do you know, Madge, I always thought that after the first re-action she preferred the Snake?"

"Don't, Clarice! How can you be so silly?"

"Well, it merely illustrates my principle that human beings are constituted that way. I once travelled Home in company with a very learned man whose business it was to devote himself to the mental, rather than the physical education, of his fellow beings. There were a great many couples on board who were carrying on most promising flirtations. I remember the shock it gave me when he said thoughtfully, after

we passed Madeira, 'I should like to ship off two or three of our Mutual Attractions into the uninhabited islands in this group, and return in a year's time to see the result!' It was a horrid idea, but I have since thought that his experiment was a foregone conclusion."

"It is n't a very satisfactory one though! It makes me doubt the reality of any attachment. Do you think all marriages are really due to opportunity and propinquity?"

"A good many are. In your case, as it happened, I was sceptical. I did not think you would have him, Madge!—but that does not prevent my being very glad."

The light had dropped lower. It lay warm on the under branches of the belt of trees on the far-off mountain-side. Margery looked away to the soft mellow prospect, — Nature's mood was one of yielding tenderness at the moment, — while she answered.

"Tell me why you thought so."

"Because I fancied you were afraid."

"Of marrying?"

"Of men. I know you have had a rougher time than any one suspects. It always seems to me one of the most hopeful signs of Human Nature," she added thoughtfully, "that we turn our bright side to the world, and keep our troubles to ourselves."

"Apparently I have not kept mine, — as you guessed it."

"Therein I take credit to myself in being keener-sighted than my neighbours, for indeed, Madge, you never wore your heart on your sleeve, or lamented your sorrows in the market-place. But, my dear, to speak plainly, a temper like your brother's is as the old proverb about Love and a Cough — it cannot be hid! There is hardly a human being in the neighbourhood to whom he has not been appallingly rude at some time or other, from which it is natural to guess at his domes-

tic character, for there he is not even restrained by conventional considerations and training."

The lines of the soft young face at which Mrs. Drysdale looked hardened with memory, — the red mouth curved cynically, — the voice which answered her was sceptical.

"I cannot say that an intimate acquaintance with Anthony is a testimonial for mankind in general as companions. But whatever state of life I find myself in, in the future, I don't think I can be much worse off than I have been, as far as that goes, so it has had its advantages in preparing me. All men have their drawbacks, I suppose; I have not discovered Lanse's yet, but I should hardly expect them to be as intolerable as Anthony's. I am of a hopeful nature!"

There was a double experience prompting the cynical little speech, and Clarice felt it. Margery had had two standards to judge by — the brutally disagreeable, as exemplified by her brother's ungoverned temper and roughness; and the brutally agreeable, which she regarded as the alternative, and had sampled in Vibart's unrestrained indulgence of his affections. She had had no opportunity of proving that there might be more refined relations between the sexes.

"Do you know, Madge, your experience has been awfully bad for you!" Clarice said. "It is as well you are marrying — you are growing hard and light in your estimates. You look upon all men as brutes and tyrants, — selfish, bestial creations from whom a woman can look for nothing but a tolerable kindness which is half animalism. But it is n't like that — not really. Mr. Crofton is n't going to knock you down if the dinner is late, or handle you like an Eastern slave girl to make up afterwards! You are all wrong — and I am so sorry, because I know you must have had a bad breaking in to give you such an impression."

"Am I really coarse in my point of view, Clarice? Have I got that kind of mind?"



"Oh, no! Oh, no! how can you think I meant that! It was only — I am so sorry — perhaps I could have helped you when you were learning — but I never knew!"

There was a silence, and the velvet light died off the velvet slopes. Down below them in the vineyard the green buds of the vines swelled with the breath of spring, and ripened for bursting. The first madness of the rising sap was in the air, and the earth's blood beat. Margery shivered with the ghost of an old sensation.

"It was that time when the boys had measles — I couldn't get at you to tell you," she said abruptly. Her voice was as soft and pretty as ever.

"Yes? — I am sorry! I am sorry! I knew something had altered you. Beau told me you had grown, — and I know what that means from him. I am afraid he was a bad acquaintance for you, Madge."

"Mr. Livingston?"

"Yes."

"I don't think he had anything to do with it — I don't know. Perhaps he helped to educate me. Clarice, you don't know what I would not give now to be the little girl whom you found crying amongst the furniture! I never can be, and Lanse does not know what he has — not gained."

"I know what you mean," Mrs. Drysdale said slowly, "but if it is any comfort to you, I must tell you that I am *sure* that the little girl I found that day would never have married Mr. Crofton! Your 'education,' as you call it, whatever influences went to make it, moulded you into a woman to attract such a nature as his. If you had merely developed in the type in which I found you, you would never have felt very much or understood very much. You would have been just a bright, ordinary little soul who would have been married by an ordinary young man with no great brains either. I don't say you would n't have been more levelly happy,

— but you would never have come within measurable distance of Lansing Crofton, though you stayed under the same roof all your days ! ”

Margery drew a deep breath, as if the pain of her development was stronger than the pleasure of her consequent gain.

“ There is a text in the Bible which I heard in church last Sunday, and which always seems to me a horrible mockery,” she said. “ It is that about God not allowing people to be tempted more than they are able, but with the temptation making also a way of escape. Don’t you think it is sometimes *impossible* to escape, Clarice ? ”

“ Yes, and more often to resist — especially for a woman. If she is wise, and realises that she is not the fine statue of steel and iron which she should be in masculine opinion, she runs away at the first sign in herself of collapse. It sometimes appals me to think of the iron wills, the dogged determination, the absolute superiority to all weakness, and imperviousness of temptations against which they would never struggle themselves, which men suppose us to possess ! I asked Ossy to explain once, and he frankly said that there was no experience up till now to justify men in thinking women the more invulnerable of the sexes ! Rude, was n’t it ? ”

“ And supposing, as I say, you *cannot* escape — ”

“ There is no supposition. The battle is probably lost by divine decree. I do not always agree with the Apostles, but I am superstitious enough to make a higher power responsible for a failure which I cannot otherwise explain. Sometimes I think that God turns a deaf ear on purpose ! ”

“ Sometimes *I* think that there is no God — for women.”

Mrs. Drysdale looked at her tenderly and pitifully. “ You will outgrow it, dear ! I have been through that

too," she said. "You will find the hardness melting out of you in your home life — there is nothing like happiness for improving people. I don't believe in adversity, it contracts souls, — good fortune expands them like sunshine. Marriage has its ups and downs, of course ; but given a decent sort of man, the woman must be a fool who can't make herself a comfortable, cosy corner of the world in which at least she is a supreme power, and which she can fill with her private and particular interests. — I must be hurrying home to mine, anyhow — Ossy will be home first if I don't."

"No one would guess how domesticated you really are, Clarice !" Madge said rather fondly, as she came out of her lounging chair to stand in front of her friend with her hands on her waist.

"It is so vulgar to be always flaunting one's peculiarities in the face of the world !" said Mrs. Drysdale, looking down benevolently from her greater height. "I hope I shall never be guilty of going about labelled, 'I am a domestic woman !' Beau used to say I concealed my vices admirably — no one would have guessed from my gowns and conversation that I knew how to darn socks and make a pudding !"

"Beau was such a looking-glass person ! He always talked backwards, and it confused me. How fond you were of him !"

"Was n't I ? Most women were who knew him well. He was so agile, his mind and body were in perfect training. He was always well-dressed and amusing, and he did not make mistakes. He was an admirable person to introduce to old ladies, and women over thirty, both of whom always displayed an amiable weakness for him ; but I should not recommend him as a guide for extreme youth !"

"He said rather dreadful things sometimes, did n't he ?" said Madge, with an irresistible chuckle. "Starling tells me she saw him in London."

"He had a penchant for Starling, which in less decided little hands than hers might have expanded into a quite uncomfortable situation. But it is a wise but unlooked for precaution of Nature's that, under those soft alluring characteristics of hers, Starling should hide a sturdy strength of purpose which is Johnnie Dodd's very own! She is like a little brown bird to look at, is n't she?"

"She can peck, though! Poor True is in disgrace just now. I can't think why, and I don't like to inquire. Ever since she came back, Starling has snubbed him unmercifully."

Mrs. Drysdale began to laugh, and she went on laughing all the way home. At dinner she divulged the secret of her mirth to her husband. "A very pretty quarrel is going on in pantomime," she said, "and the cream of the joke is that the bone of contention does not know that she *is* the bone, and is innocently wondering what has caused it."

"Clarice, if you grow enigmatical I shall dine in Cape Town another night!" protested Ossy, mildly. "I thought the last development of the dynamite monopoly a hard nut to crack, but you are even worse."

"I mean Starling and True," Mrs. Drysdale explained. "I went to see Madge to-day, and she told me in all innocence that Starling is ruffling her feathers up at True, and she can't think why!"

"Well, I don't see that she is responsible. Starling is a turk!"

"And True is a weathercock! You know he has been Madge's lapdog in Starling's absence, and of course the little bird is not going to allow her own particular property to revert to some one else, and return to her save at her own pleasure. She is far too loyal to breathe a word of resentment to Madge, who is really innocent in intention, but she has dropped True like a red-hot coal. It is very funny!"



"I don't see what Starling has to complain of! She was n't here, and True only consoled himself in her absence!"

"Unfortunately he consoled himself once too often in her presence! He was still ready to be Madge's devoted slave after Starling's return; but Madge got engaged, and then True went to Starling for sympathy, and Starling metaphorically boxed his ears!"

"True is such a general lover that his deviations do not count," said Ossy. "I had an idea that Starling would get engaged when she went Home. I wonder she returned still free."

Madge sat still on the stoep for some time after her guest had gone. It grew chill and dark, but she did not heed it, for she was thinking. She had never said as much to any mortal being about her past experience as she had to Mrs. Drysdale; but she had said all she had to say. She knew that she would go no further. Her speech with regard to Tess that she should "never, never have told her secret," was born of a deep conviction. She would never breathe more than she had to Clarice, — that vague outline of a crisis in her life, which both from her own and Clarice's wording might have been attributable to Beaumont Livingston, — and she would guard the secret in all probability to the end of her days, growing more and more jealous of any discovery as years went by and cased her more firmly in her armour of respectability. Nevertheless, she suffered as much, or more, than if she stood confessed a sinner. Madge had accomplished the thing she had tacitly demanded of Providence, — to cast her past and its actions utterly behind her, to stand free, untrammelled by discovery or criticism, and start again, as a man might do. And she failed exactly as ninety-nine out of a hundred women must, who claim an equality with men, by the very nature of their sex. The cry against the injustice of one law for women, and another

for men, is rendered unprofitable by the women themselves, who have really been at the foundation of such laws. A woman demands to be as a man, free to sow her wild oats, repent, and start again, unquestioned for her past, so long as her present and future are clean ; good, — if she is not found out she may do it. But she also demands to feel herself on a higher level, to give her new lord everything, to come to him, fresh and unsullied, virgin and from the hand of God, or is she racked by a sense of loss, of conscience, and of incompleteness, — a divided loyalty. I speak not of the *vauriens* of both sexes, who are sufficiently hardened to love no human being but themselves, and therefore have no standard but their own aggrandisement. But take any man who is a decent, straight-living fellow, — decent as men go among his fellow men, — will he, when he settles down and marries, be the prey of remorse because he has lived as men do? If he have no slips of virtue to regret he is hardly a man, is a universal verdict ; he probably will regret them, — to the extent of a passing fervent assertion that women are saints or angels, and men not fit to touch their hands, delivered during his engagement or honeymoon. We all have our puritanic hour. But the good fellow (recognised as such by his fellow men) is a healthy, hearty animal, not prone to ascetic fanaticism, or morbid sentiment. He is very sorry — he will go straight in future, and be faithful to the most angelic of her sex, but his peccadilloes do not greatly trouble him, possibly because he knows they would not greatly trouble her. On the other hand, the woman does not take the same view of herself : she also is very sorry ; but her sorrow is a desperate hunted thing, partaking of despair ; she, also, will be faithful, — she swears it on her knees, with agony and bloody sweat, and it haunts her waking thoughts and nightly dreams, until every thought bestowed on other men partakes of disloyalty. She frets

because she is not immaculate, though she alone knows it. Woman is her own executioner, and in this question of absolution for past sins, she will never be the equal of the broader, baser, less finely balanced male.

It is possible that Lansing Crofton's past would have borne less inspection than Margery Cunningham's, but that disturbed him not at all, and would have been no comfort to her had it been proved to her. She sat long into the growing dark, — as Eve sat once in Eden, — and her God walked in the Garden in his wrath, though Adam heard him not. In the midst of her retrospect she started, for she caught an actual step that she knew, — a strong man's step that ground the earth as one who had a right to tread; Margery smoothed the thought out of her face, and went to meet him. She had not seen him that day, for propriety had driven him away from Vine Lodge as soon as his engagement to her was announced, and he was staying at Cogill's.

"Well, my darling?" Crofton said fondly, with his arm round her shoulders. "What have you been doing with yourself? Have you missed me?"

Vibart's old, invariable question! She winced inwardly at the ghost that threatened to stalk perpetually beside her. I take it men are singularly unoriginal when they make love, or pray. Woman and the Deity have been perpetually hearing the same thing from the beginning of speech.

"Oh, Clarice — Mrs. Drysdale, you know — came to tea. How's the house getting on, Lanse?"

"It is nearly ready for its little mistress!"

"You don't ask if she is ready for it!"

"No, because I know you love me!"

"What has that to do with it?"

"If you want me as I want you, you won't keep me waiting —"

Margery held her breath, almost expecting him to

say that they must be "all in all" to each other. She had an hysterical desire to shriek — to hurl the truth at him — to do anything to escape from this nightmare of repetition. Vibart had said all that, and more. Nothing was new to her; there was no rapture of fresh bliss that she had not tried, and tasted, and found pall upon her. It seemed that her first lover had drained the language of fond sentiments, as he had of endearments. She found herself looking, with horrible eagerness, for a new name that Jack had not robbed of its sweetness.

"Come round the garden with me," Crofton said, drawing her closer to him. "Let's go and look for violets! There is such a beautiful moon coming up."

"It's late, — and I must go and dress for dinner. Anthony will be cross if we are not ready," said Margery, wearily. "You know there won't be any violets, Lanse. It's too early. And even if there were — they never have any scent now."



## CHAPTER XV

*"Come slowly, Eden!  
Lips unused to thee,  
Bashful, sip thy jasmines  
Like the fainting bee."*

MARGERY was married in December, a short time before Christmas. The wedding had been delayed with one thing and another until the middle of the summer, but there were advantages to be gained with the hot season. Vine Lodge wore a gala appearance in the midst of its roses and oleanders, and the wedding guests could swarm out from the confinement of the rooms into the garden. Indeed they spread onto the high banks above the tennis court, down into the vineyard, through the fir-tree plantation, and into the kitchen garden, carrying the froth of their conversation and the wedding champagne even among the mealies, for they were a goodly company. Madge had philosophically decided that as she would only run the risk of one more uproar from her brother, and would probably be beyond the reach of his tongue when the storm broke, she would for once launch out, and recklessly sent invitations to half the suburbs. They all came, from Simon's Town even out to Green Point, and Vine Lodge was strained to accommodate a full measure, pressed down and running over. It was a warm day, a day of ideal summer, such as the English only talk of in England and hardly ever experience. As Madge put on her wedding-dress she looked out of her window,

*"And saw the sky  
As blue as Aaron's priestly robe appeared  
To Aaron — when he took it off to die."*

Her bedroom overlooked the wide green stretch of country which, in its virginal freshness, had first put her in mind of the Garden of Eden. It was the same view upon which she had looked on that morning after Vibart's unexpected return, and the ensnarement of the vineyard. She looked at it for the last time as she arrayed herself with Mrs. Drysdale's assistance, and the smiling sunlit earth, teeming with multitudinous life and fertility, struck her with a sudden sense of beauty and sympathy. She realised that the familiarity of the scene had endeared it to her, and that she should miss it as the face of a friend.

"I do hope you won't lose your colour, Madge," Clarice said anxiously. "You make such a pretty bride as you are, but if you get nervous and grow white you will look as if you were fading into your dress."

"There won't be much chance for me under all this veil; I am nearly suffocated with the heat as it is!" said the bride, looking at her image in the glass, and speaking lightly to stifle the upbraiding conscience which was again loud in her ears. Her cheeks were hot with excitement, and her blue eyes with fright. "I will not draw back! I cannot draw back!" she repeated endlessly; and her heart seemed to respond, "You are no bride, but a living lie." It had not been so difficult to thrust all scruples into the background, during the busy full days of her engagement; she had caught at happiness eagerly, and contrary to the theoretical way of transgressors, had found it easy and satisfying. Besides, before the thing was absolutely done, she could shift her responsibility, did conscience prick too hard, by a feint at even now turning back. Madge's wholesome healthy nature did not entice her to brood; she demanded happiness by instinct as the proper state of humanity, as all creatures not diseased by morbid creeds and education do demand it. It was only in a crisis in her existence that she was overcome

by inherited superstition to think that her recoil from pain was a thing to be overcome and striven against. Apart from the accusations of her wedding-morning, her emotions were those of any other woman, — who is a widow. There was an inevitable comparison, and forecasting one experience from another, which, if she had had an open right to her widowhood, would have been merely natural.

A summer wedding in the suburbs is rather a pretty sight, because the men mostly wear light suits and straw hats, and none of the women venture on anything more sober than a full-blooded violet. Madge was married in the old grey church at Kenilworth, to which she had to drive a mile, but which was infinitely preferable in its mellow greys and greens to the bald building opposite the Camp meadows, which was obligingly rendered further impossible by alterations which were taking place in the roof. The sunlight which stares down the blank walls of this hideous little building is softened to a more becoming radiance in the sanctified gloom at Kenilworth, and the congregation there present had their feelings soothed instead of harrowed during the ceremony.

"We are all doomed to greasiness by the heat in any case," Polly Harbord said candidly. "But at least it will not be so woefully apparent as it would have been at Wynberg."

. . . . .

As Margery settled herself in the carriage after the service, to drive back to Vine Lodge, she turned feverishly to her new-made husband. "Lanse, let us have the windows down, please!" she said. "It is so — hot."

"Are you faint, dear?" he said anxiously, as he did as she desired.

"A little — it was the smell of the flowers. I shall be all right in a minute. No, please, don't touch me yet — let me breathe."

She threw back her veil and leaned towards the open window. The carriage was forced to pass along the main road, avoiding the tram lines as best might be. A group of Kaffir children stood on the dusty sideway under the sun-smitten fir-trees; they clapped and cheered as they caught a glimpse of the bride. Margery shrank back, her gaze resting vaguely on the winding, picturesque road, dappled with the black shadows of the trees, and the patches of strong white sunshine. Crofton put his arm round her as she withdrew from the window, and said, "My wife!" his voice sunk to the full-throated depth of sudden feeling.

"My wife!"—Not even did this come for the first time to ears robbed of its sacredness by the thieving whisper of another voice. It was her punishment, that, at a moment which should have been all her husband's in its full tenderness, she should, in a flash of fancy, be back in a shaded room, singing at the piano—some one opened a door and said a name—a brilliant gleaming figure was coming towards her—two strong arms caught her up, and a gay voice struggled in her memory with Crofton's—

"Little wife!"

She turned to her real companion and kissed him almost desperately, thrusting the ghost of a dead yesterday aside.

. . . . .  
Crofton took Margery Up Country for their honeymoon. It was a somewhat rough experience, but one which she had coveted. They covered many more miles than most honeymooners, owing to the vast characteristics of the country, and Margery found her impressions of the continent, in which she had lived for two years, undergoing a rapid enlargement. Her experience of Colonial cities being limited to Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban and Port Elizabeth were



somewhat unexpected. But, better than the towns themselves, with their florid pretensions to civilisation, she liked the vast stoniness of the Karroo, and the sense of space which the open veld gave her. Some kinship to this giant foster-country, into which Fate had tossed her hap-hazard, was always in her soul, from the first premonition among the silences of Hout's Bay. She had a curiously engrafted feeling upon Africa, a suspicion that the actual expanding of her lungs, in its unlimited miles of uncontaminated air, was an outward and visible symbol of the widening of her soul since her detachment from a safe band-box life in England. It had been a painful development; the emancipation had at one time felt like being utterly lost in a fathomless firmament; but when her soul had regained the sense of its own orbit, the immense freedom remained, with better fixed and more dependable boundaries.

Crofton had business in Johannesburg, and they stayed there longer than in the other towns. He went about and talked with old acquaintances—men he knew,—and gathered impressions. He had his own opinion, which did not tally with that of most Johannesburg men, and began to slowly adjust his affairs with a comprehensive view of the Transvaal Government. A few men in South Africa were beginning to detach their interests from the country, in those days; Crofton was probably among the very first, but his prudence was newly born. During that period of his life which was lived in Johannesburg, he was known as a daring speculator,—one of the coolest, most successful, and keenest gamblers over the mines. Like many men, his marriage had opened a new terror to him, on which he had never bestowed a thought before; he was haunted by a fear that he would die and leave Madge unprovided for—a fear which usually attacks men with small incomes, after the honeymoon. Crofton's income was not small, but his investments were almost entirely made

in the country which he knew, and about whose resources he could use his judgment. He enjoyed the management of his own affairs,—a speculation here, a disposing of risky shares, held just long enough to make it a profitable transaction, there,—according to his own excellent knowledge, just as any man does the exercise of an undeniable talent. Crofton's knowledge had been acquired with care and study, but his use of it was a gift which he could not have gained with a life's experience. Margery did not know, until long afterwards, that, during her wedding tour, her husband reconstructed his affairs sufficiently to leave her property soundly based on investments slow and sure enough to have satisfied a trustee, and had he died a month after his marriage she would have found herself possessed of an income which would not fluctuate with the glorious uncertainty attendant on the fortunes of Johannesburg.

Some vague outline of possibilities loomed in his musing conversation with Madge while on their return journey.

"Well, how have you enjoyed the trip?" he said. They were returning by train, neither of them being very good sailors.

"Oh, immensely! I like seeing new places, and Africa interests me. What enormous possibilities there are in the country!"

"Yes. You would n't rather have gone Home for a honeymoon then?"

"No —" Madge spoke with her usual decision when she had had occasion to make up her mind. "I should like to go Home some day, and introduce you to my people; but for my honeymoon, I infinitely prefer to have you to myself — in the Karroo."

"It's large enough for us both, anyway, and not over populated," Crofton said, with a satisfied laugh. "Who are your people, Madge darling? I hardly knew that you had any."

"I have n't, at least they are small and few. I have two impossible aunts; one is the widow of a clergyman, and the other is devoted to Homœopathy and the Book of Job. They are my father's sisters, and somehow they seem more Anthony's aunts than mine. But I always lived with them until I came out here. Can you imagine what a change I found it from a sleepy country town — and the Book of Job?"

"Was there much of Job about it, then?"

"Not latterly, but all my childhood is associated with boils and wailing — I don't know why, but that is all that occurs to me when I think of Job. Aunt Mary used always to read me portions of Scripture on Sunday afternoon. I can see the sleepy, hazy world outside those closed drawing-room windows now, — the green living world at which I was never supposed to look. I do think it is cruel to bore children with Bible stories, don't you? All the interesting parts are slurred over, because they are so improper, and the poor things get the bald outlines of Joseph in the pit — Esau's mess of pottage — Abraham and Isaac. If I ever — I mean if there were —"

She broke down into helpless glorious confusion. Lansing looked up, laughing wickedly, and drew her to him. "Go on, if there were — well?" he said.

"—they should never be told Bible history as *stories* — a powder-in-jam kind of trick, I always think it, that breaks down in the very telling, for you are bound to add, 'It is all *true*, you know,' which does away with the story."

"I hope '*they*' will appreciate their emancipation, that's all. Are n't you rather previous, Madge?"

"Lanse, I do think it is horrid of you to take it personally. I was merely generalising."

"It seems a heating process. Look at these cheeks!" She smuggled her flushed face against his shoulder and said, "Tell me about your own belongings!"

"I've got an old father down in Norfolk. I wrote and told him about my marriage, and I expect his answer will greet us at the Rosary. He is a crusty old chap, nearly bed-ridden. I have n't seen him for ten years."

"Did n't you ever go Home, Lanse?"

"No, there was nothing to go for, and everything to be gained by staying here and sticking to business. I had quarrelled with some of the family, too, and did n't want to meet them."

"Have you brothers?"

"Yes. I'm the third son. I don't care much about them, or they for me. We are all too firmly fixed in our own opinions to get on."

"I don't doubt it! But I think I should be civil to them if I were you. There is something so underbred in quarrelling with relations. It is like discussing your private affairs in public, for these things advertise themselves. If you can't get on, you can surely hold your peace!"

"But if you do that they think they are in the right."

"Never mind, it doesn't matter what they think. An armed peace seems to me a positive necessity in a family. Don't please quarrel with Anthony, whatever you do! He is trying, but I managed to live with him for two years, and you are only in the same neighbourhood."

"I shall probably leave him alone so long as he does me. I think we'll go Home in the spring, Madge — I mean the English autumn. It may be as well."

"What do you mean?"

"I think there's going to be a row — things are drawing to a head, that's all. I should like to take you Home first anyhow, and settle you in England, whether I came out again and went into the thick of it (as I own I should like) or no. The position in



Johannesburg has been untenable for some time, and either the Transvaal Government must reform the Civil Service, or — ”

“ Do you mean that we shall go to war ? ”

“ I very much doubt if they would fight. They might, of course, and then — well, I can't say.”

“ Surely you don't think we should be beaten ! ”

“ I don't doubt our men, my dear. What I doubt is the Home Government. They have never taken us very seriously. It will take a good deal of prodding to wake them up to the fact that there is a necessity for action, and while they are still rubbing their eyes, the Transvaal will be making preparations. Then we shall, in a leisurely fashion, begin to dribble out troops, and in the mean time Cape Colony will be fermenting on its own account. That is where the real disaster might occur. It is just possible that after the row is settled, they may understand the meaning of Progressists and Bondmen in England.”

Margery opened her eyes. Lanse very seldom stated his convictions, but when he did speak they had a way of being both forcible and surprising. She had heard plenty of the politics of the country, but hitherto they had been flavoured by the atmospheric influence of Cape Town ; she was getting a glimpse of another point of view in the lurid light of Johannesburg. Men stood nearer to the trouble there, and felt it always brewing. Furthermore, separated as they were from the immediate supervision of a British Government, they lost the sense of things British, and did not feel her power by any means omnipotent. Crofton was very English in the soul of him, but he had rubbed off his insular faith in the Island, and saw her at sufficient distance to realise her limits. The most hopeful point in the matter, to his mind, was the underestimation in which he believed the Dutch to hold the military strength of England. Those living on the spot, and

with traditional failures fresh in their minds, did not, however, realise that England might also underestimate the military strength of the Dutch. But it was an undeveloped speculation to Crofton on his wedding tour, and one which only weighed in influencing him to secure himself against a possible mischance.

Almost the first person whom Margery encountered on her return was Beaumont Livingston. He had come out again, he said, because they had fallen into a disgusting habit of east winds in England, and the doctor ordered him off to warmer lands. A suspiciously weak chest lurked under Beau's immaculate shirtfronts, and was the only traitor to him in exposing him as a delicate man, despite his even health and active habits.

"The draughts on the steamer were enough to doom a Hercules," he said to Madge. "I caught a cold and lost my temper,—two things I could well have reversed to my own satisfaction. The stewards always left the saloon doors open too; I daresay you have observed that stewards are natural murderers, just as people on board are natural thieves. (I lost most of my rugs, and all my books and papers, by the way.) It is something in the sea air induces it."

"I am glad we did n't come back from Durban by sea. We brought several Karosses Up Country, and I should have been sorry to lose them."

"You would n't possess one now, if you had. I cannot think why they do not add a few private detectives and a policeman to their staff on board. I shall suggest it to Donald Currie. He is a man who is especially quick to see a great idea and pounce upon it. I only meant to go to Madeira, but the New Hotel looked cold, and I knew no one there, and it rained, and somehow before I knew where I was we had stopped in Cape Town docks. Most annoying! So you are married? How very enterprising that was of you!"

"Was n't it! Have you met my husband?"

"Yes, he seems to be a nice fellow ; but you would know best of course. I don't wish to be hasty. Why did n't you wait for me?"

"There was too much competition," said Madge, gravely, suppressing the faintest suspicion of dimples. "If I had married you I should have expected all my friends to ask me to tea and poison it."

"Like Mrs. Naseby's story of the girls who all wanted to nurse her when she fell ill. 'No, thank you, my dears,' she used to say. 'You are all too fond of Reggie.' You would n't fancy any one being too fond of Reggie, would you?"

"Well, I can't say Mr. Naseby attracts me. I should not have decided on him as the motive for the crime, if any one had poisoned Mrs. Naseby."

"No, I think she might have looked nearer home. I have sometimes felt that to choke her would be a good and useful act. Apropos of nothing, Madge, I am going to use your Christian name, now that you are married. A married woman is so much more defenceless than a girl, that it is ridiculous to be formal with her."

"Very well. Do you expect—"

"Winter sunsets in England are over-rated," remarked Beau, with his eyes fixed steadily upon her face. "No, I don't expect. Expectation is for fools. My knowledge of your sex amounts to certainty."

"I did n't want to do anything which you might have regarded as questionable taste," said Madge, frankly.

"You could not."

"Thank you. Well, of course you must know that we all call you Beau behind your back!"

"How very charming of you! My own beauty has, of course, always been patent to me. Still it is nice to have such an opinion so delicately confirmed."

"And you know," Margery remarked, when she re-

peated the incident for Mrs. Drysdale's entertainment, "I felt there was some truth even in his nonsense. He really is beautiful, Clarice. I thought so more than ever, yesterday."

"He is looking very well just now," Mrs. Drysdale admitted. "The voyage set him up, but I am afraid he was really ill before he left England, poor old fellow. No one realises that Beau can have a weakness, but his lungs are not sound, really."

"He always seems so well."

"Yes, and his spirits are so good. But it is one of the tragedies of this place, to me, that many of our nicest, brightest friends and acquaintances — those who are readiest for everything and never seem to tire — could not be the same everywhere. Mrs. Redmayne, for instance, can't live in England; the damp kills her. It is just as if they were buoyed up by the African sunshine. And yet how gay we all are!"

Clarice had dropped in at the Rosary in passing, and caught Madge in the garden. They were standing among the standard roses, talking, and overlooking the Camp road, for the garden was an old Dutch Tuin, built in terraces, and the gate was on a lower level down various flights of steps. Margery revelled in the garden; it was full of flowers and fruit, and the natural luxuriance of growing things in that climate had caused them to overflow the prim Dutch borders and make a fair wilderness in which she could wander.

"Where's Mr. Crofton?" Clarice asked, as she turned reluctantly towards the gate. "It's so nice and cool here I don't want to go back into that hot dusty road."

"He's ridden over to the wine farm. You have no idea what a great resource that wine farm is! He would be wretched with nothing to do, and he has great ideas of making it pay."

"I daresay he will. He is a very sensible man, anyway. You look much better, Madge!"



"I was n't ill, Clarice — only the wedding fagged me, rather."

"I don't mean that. You have lost the hard look and ways about which I warned you."

"I am very happy !"

"Ah ! you are finding out that what I said was true."

"Clarice, do you think it can last?"

"Of course it can — unless you expect your whole life to be exactly like your honeymoon. Then you will be disappointed."

"Oh, no — I don't mean that. I — should n't like it ! I know it sounds odd, but I think I like the quiet affection of every-day life better than being always in extremes. Of course you must be for a little while, but it 's very comfortable to settle down."

"That will last, dear, anyway."

"Will it? Do you think any human being is ever allowed to be perfectly happy for long? Oh, Clarice, I am content with very little ! I don't think I ever asked very much of life. I am not very ambitious, even socially. I like to know nice people, but I never aimed at being in with the Government House set, as so many women here do. My home and my husband are quite sufficient for me, and would be so even if Lanse had been a poor man, so long as we cared for each other. I only want to be happy and content in my own small way !"

Her voice was almost passionate with the superstitious fear which haunts human beings who have seen their treasures in danger of being swept from them by a ruthless power of which they may not ask questions. The inward dread that she had no right to the happiness she had taken sometimes beset Margery. She held her breath lest Providence should be angry at her presumption and bring her beautiful palace of delight tumbling down about her ears. Yet she had, as she

said, been very happy in her marriage, with a warm increasing home-happiness which she rightly treasured. She felt so secure in her husband's love, and her own escape from the past; and as yet no premonition of any slur cast on her name had reached her. She walked with closed eyes and ears in her golden dream, unconscious that her secret had even been suspicioned in the most remote fashion.

"One almost feels that if one asks so little, Providence must be propitious. But one can't say — one can't say!" Mrs. Drysdale said slowly. "Look at poor V. C.! He did n't ask very much — he was only weak where a woman was concerned, and if she made him think she understood him and appreciated him, he was like wax in her hands. V. C. always fancied himself an exceptional man, and it has been his disaster. He was only over-sensitive and easily managed; but the Gods' sense of humour strikes me as a grim one in his case! — There's a cycle going by, Madge, — two of them! Who is it?"

"Polly Harbord and some man. Polly! Polly! Are n't you coming in?"

She ran along the terrace and looked over the hedge to nod good-morning, her face smiling out from a frame of plumbago, for the delicate blue flowers made a screen between the garden and the road.

"Yes, I'm coming!" called Polly, gaily. "How are you? Where shall I put the bicycle?"

"Leave it inside the gate. Come along — Mrs. Drysdale is here!"

"Well, how are you both!" Polly said as she ran up the steps. She looked her usual cool smart self, though her face was flushed with the heat. "Isn't it a day! Are you glad to get back, Madge?"

"Yes, but it was awfully interesting. Have you been doing much? I was sorry to miss the Sapper's ball. Was it good?"

"Yes, awfully jolly. Mrs. Hand-painted Lady came in no clothes to speak of, and Lilla Cayley was there too — in the supper-room. I was sorry for V. C. They could n't get her out."

"Poor fellow! It makes my heart ache the more I hear of Mr. Cayley's domestic affairs. Who was with you just now, Polly?"

"Teddy Barton. He caught me up just outside Vine Lodge. I say, Madge, it's such a joke! Did you know your brother was taken captive by the Hand-painted One and paraded all round the paddock at the last gymkana?"

"Anthony! — at a race meeting!"

"Yes, and with Mrs. Cromo Dame. Oh, she made him go, depend upon it! I asked him what tribe of insects he was studying at Kenilworth, and he smiled his ugliest and said butterflies and caddis-worms! — *caddish*-worms, see? I had no idea that he knew how to apply his natural rudeness so well!"

"But I can't get over it!" said Madge, gasping. "Blanche must be a clever woman!"

"She will be too clever for the Professor, if he does n't look out. Ah, by the way, Teddy told me some news. You know the Duke's Colonel was ill?"

"Poor old man! Yes, the Subs said the War Office meant to finish him off out here. Is he worse?"

"Dead!"

"Good Heavens! The second in eighteen months! The Duke's will get a name for finishing their chiefs!"

"He caught typhoid," said Polly, in explanation. "They think the Camp was unhealthy, and it is being moved, or seen to or something, now it's too late. Several of the men had a touch of fever, and I suppose the Colonel was in bad health, as his was the only fatal case. Have you heard who is to take his place?"

"No —"

"Jack Vibart. It's nearly sure, though I don't know

if it's Official yet. But he has got his promotion, and in all probability will come out again as Colonel. Isn't he lucky!"

Margery was hardly aware of drawing a breath before she heard her own laugh, and her voice saying naturally, "Well, at all events I am glad it is some one we know! It will be much nicer to have Major Vibart than a stranger." She had the desperate feeling that whatever happened she must save the pause she dreaded after Polly's announcement.

"He is coming out at once — I should think he would start as soon as he is officially appointed," Polly added carelessly. "Are you playing in the Duke's Tennis Tournament, Mrs. Drysdale? You know the Rutlandshires are lending the Camp ground, Madge?"

"No, are they? I am glad. It is such a pretty garden, and I do like things going on at Camp. We have been dreadfully dull since the Duke's went."

Madge spoke mechanically still. She kept her smiling face until her chance guests departed, and stood on the steps watching them off down the road, and calling a laughing farewell after them. Then she turned slowly back through the roses, and went into the house and up to her own room. She examined her face in the glass anxiously; had she betrayed the least disturbance, she feared Polly's sharp eyes, but the mask of soft youth and health which Nature had given her was her safest guard. "I know I did not change colour — that was the only thing to fear," she thought, moving restlessly about the room. "But who would have thought of — this! It seems impossible. In my wildest moments, when I imagined what evil trick Fate could play me, I never thought of his coming out again. And yet how natural! I might have expected it." With an impatient movement, as if to be still were impossible, she tossed some pretty frippery on the table on one side, and disclosed the little brown poetry book which by



chance she had left lying there. Madge had meant to destroy the volume on her marriage, but it was somewhat difficult to burn a whole, strongly bound book in the small grates and seldom lighted fires of her brother's house, and she feared comment. She had kept it for a better opportunity. Now, as she turned the leaves and read his name on the titlepage in that unknown woman's handwriting, it occurred to her that she could send it back to Vibart and then her eyes fell on this —

“I cried for madder music and for stronger wine;  
But when the feast is finished and the lamps expire,  
Then falls thy shadow, . . . the night is thine;  
And I am desolate and sick of an old passion —”

She flung it from her, shuddering. That morbid sensual cry of a soul reverting to its lost gods sickened her. “I have been faithful to thee — in my fashion.” It was like a hideous reproach to her. She looked mentally from her present to her past, and it seemed to her that she had been faithful to neither of the men whom she had professed to love. That old doubt of the reality of her own emotions which had made her aghast in the first re-action of her feeling for Vibart, beset her again suddenly.

“And I was desolate and sick of an old passion, —  
Yea, hungry for the lips of my desire!”

This lurid, debauched confession of sexual experiences had yet a tardy merit of faith to a first love —

“I have been faithful to thee, Cynara, in my fashion.”

It appeared, somehow, terrible to Madge that she had no least attraction towards Vibart left. New-made wife though she was, she felt as if her very absorption in Crofton stripped her of the least excuse for that former passion. She could not recall a grain of sentiment for Vibart; the whole experience only seemed to her horrible and vulgar. She wondered

how she could have felt as she must have done to make it possible, . . . as she ought to have felt once and for always to make it pardonable to her jangled conscience.

"I have not even been faithful — in my fashion!" she said half recklessly, locking the book up in a drawer. "I seem to have a horrible, degraded nature. But I don't care for anything but keeping Lanse's love — if Jack Vibart were dead I should not care! — and yet, once, I could do *that*."

A voice called her from below, and her husband's step sounded across the wide square hall. "Madge!" called Crofton, cheerily. "Where are you? Come down to luncheon. I am as hungry as a hunter!"

The trivial sweet familiarity of everyday things faced her vividly in the happy confidence of his tones. It looked doubly precious in the peril of the threatened future. She turned from her troubled musings determinedly, and training her lips to their usual smile, ran down the stairs to meet him.

## CHAPTER XVI

*"The tale was true. Marriage is of the world,  
Dreams are the Garden, and the Serpent, Fate,  
And Love is still the Angel at the Gate."*

MRS. DRYSDALE stopped at Friedenhof on her way home, and went in to see Starling, in reference to a doll show which was to take place at Rosebank for the benefit of certain Missions, and for which the female population of the neighbourhood were very busy making clothes.

"I want to know if you have any scraps of flannel you can let me have," she said, sitting down in the middle of the dressmaking operations. "I suppose Lady Jane Grey did wear flannel petticoats. At any rate I am dressing her with one."

"It is so difficult to avoid anacronisms, is n't it?" said Starling, with a sigh, pushing a singularly naked black doll on one side to hunt for flannel. "There is one comfort in dressing Kaffirs, they need have nothing underneath. A blanket and beads is full dress for them!"

"My dear Starling, I do hope you confine yourself strictly to the dolls, when you say so! What is that waxen beauty going to be?"

"A court lady. It's so much easier to manage modern dress. I always get mixed when I try a certain period. Is n't that brocade pretty? There is just enough for the train."

"It is the same you wore at the Sapper's dance, is n't it? You looked particularly nice that night, Starling."

"So my partners hinted," said Starling, calmly. "I think I felt so."

"What was the matter with you when you met me in the lounge? That glass-house makes an admirable sitting-out spot, by the way. You were with True, or rather he was behind you, when you suddenly dashed out from a grove of ferns and pranced back to the ball-room. You looked so upset that really if it had been any one but True, I should have imagined things."

A passing disturbance was discernible in Starling's face at the present moment. She rummaged among several indescribable small garments with her head turned away, and when she spoke, she hesitated in a most unusual fashion. As a rule, Starling did not hesitate, soft and cooing though her voice was; nor did she make confidences.

"There was nothing the matter — only we had been sitting out quite long enough, and — You know those two low chairs up in the corner? Well, we were there."

"It is dark," said Mrs. Drysdale, sympathetically.

"Yes, but I don't mind that, as a rule." The little brown head came up with an impatient jerk that suggested a "touch-me-if-you-dare" attitude towards mankind in general, be the light never so dim. "The fact is," — she spoke with a sudden rush of words, — "I could n't find his right arm, and after a while I began to get nervous."

"It is an awkward thing to lose," said Mrs. Drysdale, dryly. "But one's partner's right arm is the first thing to become 'not seen, but dimly felt' in a conservatory. I have known it to be the left," she added musingly. "Go on, Starling."

"So at last I said, 'True, I should like to know where your other arm is —' was n't it mad of me? But you know we have had several tiffs lately, and I have got into a habit of saying what I mean straight out to him. And he said, 'It's along the back of your chair —' "



"He ought to have been ashamed of himself," Mrs. Drysdale interpolated. "Only now I come to think of it, True never has been that. Perhaps —" this was a flash of intuition, "he has never had cause to be."

"Well, I said, 'Please don't demoralise the chairs that I sit on like that — it's so bad for them.' Yes, I know it was nonsense, but I was getting nervous."

"Oh, True does n't count."

"No, he does n't count, but the light was very low, and he was there — somewhere — and I did n't quite know where. I said, 'Will you please put your arm somewhere else,' and he put it somewhere else."

"Which was worse, of course."

"I did n't let it stop there," said Starling, in an injured tone. "If it had been any other man I could have got into a rage and flounced round, but you know how it is with True, he begins so gently and courteously that you've nothing to take hold of, and before you know where you are, you're there, you know. I've snubbed him ever so many times lately, until I felt at last that I could n't be crushing any more — it is like breaking a butterfly."

"I don't see that it matters," said Mrs. Drysdale, consolingly. "As it was only True." She looked at Starling casually as she spoke, and made a mental note. "She always laughed before when men tried to make fools of themselves, — she does n't laugh now. She is on the verge of being really uneasy and uncertain of herself. With True of all men! He must have given some hint of the masculine side of him, which is a slip for True, or is it the reality of the man, which we all ignore, asserting itself after all? — I am interested — I shall look on."

But when she met him later in the day, at Mrs. Johnnie's tennis, her new keen-sightedness was lulled back into her former acceptance of him as he represented himself. True was playing the game with cat-

like deftness, and his voice came across the courts with its usual precision, chanting the score, "40. 15. — 40. 30. — vantage — vantage all!" — he made a run and lifted a ball over the net with deadly swiftness. The sun shone on his brown head and sunburnt face, and on the strong set of his shoulders under the loose pink shirt. Mrs. Drysdale saw his eyes gleam and flash as they followed the ball; he was just the ordinary young soldier playing tennis adroitly, and armoured with all the surface life which disguised the real True, if such a thing existed. She felt baffled, and turned to Madge Crofton rather helplessly.

"How well True is playing!" she said.

"True does everything well," said Madge, inclusively. "He is the best billiard player in his regiment, and he beats them all at tennis or cycling. Look at his pink shirt! True *is* vain. He knows perfectly well that that colour is exactly the shade to suit him. He would n't be nearly so sweet in blue."

Mrs. Drysdale's eyes still followed the flying balls and the active young figures. "Starling was telling me that at the Sapper's dance he tried to put his arm round her when they were sitting out!" she said laughing.

"Only tried?" Madge asked, raising her eyebrows with a flash of mischief in her eyes. "How good of Starling! It would n't have stopped at that with me, in her place, I feel sure. Would it with you, Clarice?"

"Oh, I should have told him not to be a fool! So would you probably. Only you would have let him go on being one all the while. Starling did n't apparently. I can't think what has come to her — unless she met some one at Home. It can't be True."

"No, it does seem a little impossible. Still I suppose we all have our other side." She turned her face with a shadow on it and looked at the crowd of people

laughing and chattering among the trees. "The other side is difficult to realise in Wynberg and the sunshine," she said. "Look at Edith Hofman and Mr. Forrester, for instance. We none of us know what the trouble is there — and yet there is a fault somewhere."

True came across the courts racket in hand, and smiling broadly. He looked the impersonation of sunshine. "Will you come and have tea?" he said. "I won. I always want tea when I've won."

"I'm dying for something to drink," Madge said, dropping her gravity of a minute since, and dimpling into laughter. "Come along, True — you are a dear little thing, and you always offer me just what I want."

And they went away together to play with the fruit and cake like children — laughing lightly above the unwritten tragedies of their lives, if tragedies there were, as the African sunlight danced among the gloomy fir-trees. Margery kept True near her as long as possible. She was anxious not to think, — to talk the merest nonsense, and to forget the morning's news and strain. She dreaded hearing Vibart's arrival discussed among the people round her, and kept on chattering to True or Beaumont Livingston all the afternoon.

"I can't be grave — I dare n't. I won't think," she said to herself. "For safety's sake I must be gayer than usual to-day. Lanse will come and fetch me presently; I want him to find me laughing and talking. If I have anything to say to V. C. or Major Yeats this afternoon, they will make me grave — they always touch the deeper part of me. I shall stick to True and Beau Livingston."

She found Beau in conversation with his host, and joined them without ceremony. Johnnie Dodd was speaking in puffs a note higher than usual, which betrayed agitation. Also, regardless of Madge's approaching figure, he still sprinkled his remarks with expletives, — a thing he was learning to restrain before

ladies. His subject, as Madge soon found, was Great Britain in general, and her modes of government in particular. There is generally a singular silence on subjects with a political aspect in Anglo-African society, because if your next neighbour is not a Bondman, he is probably a South African born, with Views about the Home Authorities and their attitude toward his country. The innate wickedness in Beau Livingston was never more discernible than when he drew on Johnnie Dodd to speak his mind in the risk of a mixed social gathering.

"You may be a great Nation," he was panting at Beau, who was obviously enjoying himself very much; "but if you go on bungling as you have been doing since '81, you'll lose Africa. We're not going to be governed by a set of old women who can't stand up for themselves! We'll have a United South Africa — we'll separate ourselves from Britain — we'll —"

"But, my dear fellow," said Beau, hugely delighted, "what could we do but apologise after the Raid? It was out of all order. Still if it had succeeded —" He shrugged his shoulders. "The Johannesburg men should have seen to that."

"The John'isburg men!" spluttered Johnnie. "What could they do? They waited and waited till the time should be ripe, and were ready to form up at a minute's notice. I spoke to a man, last time I was up there, who told me he moved his musket four times one day — saw the notice at the Club and took it to the next hiding-place, as soon as the police tracked them. They were willing enough to fight when the order came. What more could they do? They sent their wives down at two hours' notice, and held themselves ready. It was their business to wait. They were rushed, as half the Colony knows. If Jameson had n't been —"

"Well, it was a deuced good thing for the Boers," Beau interrupted aggravatingly. "They are burrowing



like moles since, and throwing up earthworks in all directions. The Raid was just the excuse they wanted."

"Damn them!" said Johnnie Dodd, piously. "England will have to do something soon. The Transvaal Government is unendurable. Those old fools at Home want stirring up, and unless I'm very far wrong, they're going to get it."

"Friend Rhodes has been trying to stir them up to his railway," said Beau, with the graceful lightness in touching solemn things which might have belonged to the time of the Empire. Madge felt as if the delicate hand which held his cigarette would have suited a gold-headed cane or lace ruffles equally well.

"He has n't succeeded very well," she remarked, joining the conversation. "What slow-coaches they are at Westminster! England is so dreadfully respectable that she almost looks upon progress of any kind as a sin against propriety."

"Respectable!" snorted Johnnie Dodd. "How about their Society? They ask men out to dinner whom I would n't have inside my doors, because they've made money on the Rand, and make a lot of them, and accept their wives — when the relations between them have been notorious out here!"

"But they can't know anything about these men as you do, Mr. Johnnie," put in Madge, soothingly. "My husband says that when they accept men in London who have been blackballed at the Kimberley or Johannesburg Clubs, it is simply because they are ignorant about their somewhat shady pasts."

"Then they ought to know!" retorted Mr. Johnnie, manfully. "They can find out. Some one must introduce these — these outsiders into English society; — where is the voucher for their right to be there? D'you think I'd let Mrs. Johnnie know the rinsings of the Kimberley gangs or the John'isburg crowd, without

knowing who they were, and proving them decent chaps, at all events? I don't set up to be over nice, Mrs. Crofton; I've made my money amongst men who were n't fit to come into your drawing-room, very likely; but that's all in the way of trade, and if I made it amongst them, I did n't do it like them. But if I know a gentleman when I see one, though used to associate with men who were n't and never could be, I should think your English aristocracy ought to be able to do so a good deal better. Instead of which, they seem to lick the boots of any one who's got a fortune together, goodness knows how!"

"But, my dear fellow," said Beau, sweetly, "the English aristocracy, as you call them, don't care twopence about good breeding or a decent past! They have n't got it themselves nowadays, and they are not so unjust as to demand it elsewhere. What they want is to make money, and when they meet a man who has made it they naturally conclude that he can show them the trick also. Hence their amiability. A little shoving on your part, Johnnie, a few introductions, — you've met a dozen people who could give you those, — a few dinners which would get rid of some of your superfluous cash, and they would have extended the right hand of fellowship to you also."

"Thanks, I don't want their fellowship on those terms, any more than I'd have my daughter presented with some of the women who have been to the Drawing-rooms. I told Starling I was n't going to have her on a par with that set. Of course the English debutantes are all right — every one knows about them; but I've heard — I don't know if it's true — that there have been some John'sburg women presented who were n't all right, and Starling would rank as one of them, and not with the English girls. I know the Queen's particular, but those who are responsible to her don't seem to be so."

"You are delightfully young, Johnnie!" Beau said, his blue eyes nearly lost in wrinkles of laughter. "Madge, let us go and have some more to eat. We shall never educate him up to the age; but we can allow him to feed us who *are* educated."

"I wonder if I am educated up to the age?" said Madge, as they strolled off together. "I always thought I was a little behind it."

"You were," said Beau, amiably. "But I think you are a little before it now. It is the last fashion, I found, both in Paris and London, for married women to be secretly in love with their own husbands,—an open secret, of course, like all these things. You are in love with your own husband, are you not?"

"Do you know I begin to be a little afraid that I am!" said Madge. "However, we can ask him when he arrives. What a lot of cakes! Mrs. Johnnie always seems to get new ones for her afternoons. I can't think how she manages it."

"I wish she would n't have so many. It scares me off Friedenhof for a week after I see a spread like this. I have the greatest objection to helping my friends to eat up the remains of a feast at which I was an original guest. They will live on those cream pastries for days, you know, as pudding, and at five o'clock tea one will recognise all the biscuits—a little stale."

"One might do worse, even after the freshness is off," said Madge, nibbling daintily at a slice of almond paste and nougat. Looking past Beau, her eyes fell on Lansing, and brightened. She did not know that he had arrived, but he had promised to fetch her. He was standing in the centre of the room, with his side face to her; he was always perfectly upright, but stooped a little from the neck, so that his chin nunted forward. It was a characteristic attitude of his, and accentuated the forcible expression of his strong, restrained face. He always gave strangers the impres-

sion of a man who was going forward. Madge's eyes dwelt on him with a little loving appreciation of his — to her — superiority to the other men present. He was talking to Teddy Barton, and though the Irishman was somewhat taller, his easy figure and shallow, good-looking face became purposeless beside Crofton's. While she was still looking at him, as if by instinctive sympathy, he turned, and their eyes met with a little flash of recognition and understanding, — a half humorous greeting as of two who were very close together in mind as well as heart. A warm glow of pleasure and satisfaction thrilled Madge, to be followed as quickly by a flash of pain. "How sweet it is to feel that we belong to each other! We are so near together, that our very souls seem to take and give greeting without hindrance. And presently we shall go home, and discuss all this, and talk as friends as well as lovers. But if something should go wrong! If he should find out — anything — and I should lose it all! I dare not think what he would do — what would happen. Oh, I was not nearly so frightened even when I married him, for I did not care for him one half so much as I do now, or I could never have run the risk of having had his trust and losing it!" With a remembrance that she meant Lansing to see her gay and enjoying herself, she pulled her forces together, and went on talking to Beau with feverish gaiety.

Crofton might have been surprised had he seen her acting the part of wallflower, but as a fact he would almost have preferred it to her light incessant chatter to the men who hovered round her. He was inclined to be jealous at times. "An excellent tendency, but a bad fault, once it goes too far," Mrs. Drysdale said to Madge. Miles Mowbray had, by Margery's own invitation, made an arrangement to ride with her the next morning, but a little resentful remark of her husband's on the homeward way decided her not to mention it then, rapidly calculating that Lanse's mood might have



changed by the morning. She had seen very little of Miles since his removal to Simon's Town, but he had never been a great favourite with Crofton, who, however, started for Cape Town before the boy arrived. He had business which would keep him there until the afternoon, and Madge casually remarked at the last minute that she might go for a ride, perhaps, — if any one turned up, — by which she compounded also with her own conscience.

"All right, only don't tire yourself. It is going to be hot," Lanse returned in his customary tones. Madge was relieved, but she did not order her pony until Mowbray absolutely appeared, trusting that Fate might throw something in the way. She had not dreamed of Lanse's objecting; she had always ridden with this man or that while she had lived under her brother's roof, and did not think of even mentioning her intention, though she had no motive of concealment before his sudden small display of jealousy. But she would have sacrificed any amount of rides rather than put Lanse out, and if she had had time would have written and excused herself to Mowbray. The Fates were unpropitious, for he arrived before eleven, and having no adequate excuse, Madge ordered the ponies and they set out.

Mowbray was arrayed in spotless garments; from his white breeches to his curly hair there was not a speck of dust or dirt upon him, but his whole person was pervaded with a sense of uneasiness and gloom. The boy had a quaint white face, and blue eyes that twinkled with good-humour and a spice of mischief as a rule. But the light in them had been snuffed out, and when they rested upon Margery they were full of concern. At first she hardly noticed his unusual gravity, but when they had ridden out some miles, and in spite of a good gallop he was still depressed, she turned in her saddle and looked at him more closely.

They were riding along the hot white road to Tokai, — a newly made road that had not yet turned red like its fellows, — out in the soft glare of the sunshine, with the green mountain plantation before them. Mowbray was looking straight ahead at Tokai, and not at her, at the moment.

"Miles, what is the matter?" she said suddenly. She had long since dropped into using his Christian name, even before her marriage "legitimised the act," as Beau would have said.

"There is nothing the matter!" he returned rousing himself.

"Yes, there is; you have hardly spoken a word, and I know there is something on your mind. Do tell me!" She wondered if it were a love-trouble, and spoke kindly and coaxingly. The boy was so young it could be only calf-love, she decided in her newly attained wisdom of a married woman, but he should not be ridiculed.

"I wonder if you would be angry —" he began, and hesitated and got honestly red.

"I? No, of course not! Why should I?"

"It concerns you."

"Me!"

"Yes —"

"Then I think you had better tell me — unless you are sure it could only do harm and not good."

"I am not sure. It is only — men are such brutes! — but I wanted to warn you. I think you ought to know that they talk, that you may be able to defend yourself, and give them no chance." He was so genuinely troubled, and so nicely in earnest, that it was impossible to be offended. Nevertheless he gave her the chance. "Of course you can say it is no business of mine, and shut me up. But I knew you and Crofton would be annoyed if it came to your ears in — in a worse way perhaps. And I should be so

awfully sorry," he added loyally. "Don't be offended, please!"

The young round face at his side seemed suddenly to lengthen and harden. The youth went out of it, and a frightened, reckless look came instead, like a woman at bay. "What is it that you mean?" Madge said quietly, controlling herself. "Tell me, please. I am not offended. But I must know what you mean."

"I mean — that people talk — our fellows especially. I should like to choke the stories in their own throats!" he added fiercely, "Only that might do more harm than good."

"Yes, please do not make a fuss. I should not like that. They talk about me, I suppose?"

"Yes —"

"And — any one else?"

"Yes —"

"In particular?"

"A man named Vibart, who was here before, and is coming out again — our new Colonel probably. I never met him, we were always in different battalions, and when I joined I went straight to India. You knew him, I suppose?"

She rallied her forces, gripped the reins between her relaxing fingers, and settled herself firmly in her saddle. She had not expected this, and she must meet it, and find out how far the mischief had gone.

"Oh, yes, I knew Major Vibart," said she. "He was very popular here. For that matter, I have no doubt that he has been talked of with a number of women. You know in a place like this every one gossips."

"Yes," he said doubtfully.

"But you have not heard it?"

"Only about you, as far as he is concerned. Oh, I have heard plenty of stories of course, and I know his reputation is rather shady. Great pity he is coming to us, I think — I know I wish he were n't,"

There was a silence, while the horses' hoofs beat crisply on the good, hard road. A little bright-coloured bird flew out of a clump of sugar-bushes, and the heads of the same handsome flowers strewed the path before them where the Kaffir children had flung them down after sucking the honey. Margery had ridden that way with Vibart sometimes.

"Well, what do they say of me—more particularly?" she said almost sharply, when the pause became intolerable.

"Oh, they—talk! I can't tell you—it's horrid lies! I only wanted to warn you so that you might balk them of anything more to say. He is probably coming out again, you know. That's what made the talk,—at least—revived it. I'm awfully sorry it should ever have happened—I don't believe a word of it, you know that—of course I could n't! Except I know you do flirt!"

A slight smile curved Madge's stiff lips in spite of herself. "Do I? I don't mean to—it's only fun," she said. "I daresay I gave the gossips plenty to say, because I talked to Major Vibart, as to any man who made himself pleasant to me. No doubt I was n't very discreet, because it never occurred to me to be so. That is all, Miles. But I want you to promise me something."

"Yes?"

"Don't make a fuss, or tell these men that it is a lie, with a false idea of defending me. That it is a lie is quite sufficient." (Again that tightened grasp of the rein, which her horse felt and tossed his head impatiently, and that strained gaze at Tokai drawing ever nearer to them.) "You would only make matters worse by deigning to discuss them. I do not care what such people say of me, but I agree with you that it is just as well to give them nothing to use as a foundation for any tale, however wildly they exaggerate. I



shall be careful should I meet Major — I mean Colonel Vibart, that is all."

"You are an angel to take it like this! Most girls would have raged, and snapped my head off. But you were always so reasonable, Madge. And you are n't angry?"

"No, I realise that you meant it far too kindly to be angry about it. But I don't think we need discuss it again. Shall we have a gallop?"

The cloud was gone from his face, she was glad to see, as they rode forward more quickly. Only a slight melancholy remained, possibly due to his recent disturbance. It was not until they were walking slowly homeward again — for it was then too hot to go quickly — that another side of the question occurred to her mind, if not as terrifying, almost as discomfoting as the first.

"Miles, was this — gossip, the reason that you have hardly been to see me since my engagement?" she said.

He went a shade whiter. "Not entirely," he said briefly.

"You used to run in two or three times a week. I put it down to your being at Simon's Town at first, when you did n't come —"

"As if that would have stopped me!"

"Then it was n't that?"

"No!"

She hesitated a minute, then stretched out her hand to him gently. "What was it, Miles?" she said.

The boy caught his breath. "You know!" he said as his hand fastened eagerly on hers. "I always did, Madge, — from the very first!"

"Oh, I am so sorry! — only you are so young — it won't last. I know that's cold comfort, only — I am sure you will get over it. I hope so. I'm not good enough to be any one's first love!"

"You're good enough for me," he said huskily. "Did you never guess?"

"Not until just now — it struck me. It was your being so worried over that — gossip."

"I should like to have killed some of them!" he said hotly. "Some men don't deserve to live. They ought to be shot at sight. They say Vibart's like that. Was he a great friend of yours?"

"You need n't be jealous of him," said Madge, detecting the reason of his inquiry. She smiled rather sadly, a tired, strained smile unlike her own. "I assure you I shall not be likely to see much of Colonel Vibart, even if he comes out again, nor do I desire to. I knew him much as I knew True, or — or Mr. Forrester, or any one." (She marvelled at herself.) "What a foolish boy you are!"

"I can't help it. I know I'm a fool where you are concerned. Madge dear, don't flirt with any of the fellows round here — stick to your husband. He's a good sort. There are such a lot of tongues ready to slander you, and I can't bear it. It's only because you are prettier and more popular than other women, and these snakes are always writhing about trying to sting — but they are poisonous sometimes. You are so good really, and so pure-minded that you don't think, — how should you? — and you don't know what is said. It is because I believe in you myself, heart and soul — as I do in my religion, and every fellow has got some sort of a creed, deep down, that he does n't talk about — it is just that makes me warn you."

Perhaps one of the keenest whips with which a woman can be scourged is the undeserved confidence and faith of her friends. When she knows that she is not the divinity that some human soul makes of her, then perhaps she first begins to appreciate the position she has in reality lost. Madge coloured faintly; all she said was, "Don't make idols of human clay, Miles.

They might fail you," and he answered, "Oh, you won't fail me! You must n't think, because I asked you not to flirt, that I don't know how —"

"I understand," she interrupted briefly. "Only — I fancied you were making me a goddess. I am only one of the ordinary run of women."

The truth of her own words came home to her as she spoke them. She had indeed been only one of the ordinary run of women, with a little more opportunity than most, and to a certain extent victimised by circumstances. That she might have risen superior to such circumstances, and proved herself a worthier ideal for Miles Mowbray and his like, she acknowledged. She never parried the truth, or excused herself — she was indeed rather unmerciful in her self-condemnation, now that the former vivid attraction had faded from her mind so as to seem no more a possible temptation. The remainder of the ride was a silent one; Mowbray shook hands with her at her own gate, and would not stay to luncheon. The grip of his hand, and the expression in his young blue eyes haunted her miserably for hours. "It is all right — I am not a bit annoyed," she said frankly. "If I had been I could easily have prevented your speaking. Don't come here for the present, that's all. I love Lansing, you know. There could never have been any question of my marrying any one but him. Good-bye, Miles."

She went to her solitary luncheon, and tried to think. Even the revelation of Mowbray's feeling for her took a secondary place in her mind to his account of the way her name was coupled with Vibart's. She tried to think. There was real danger here, — danger that must be averted. She shrank and caught her breath, realising that the story — some version or hint of it — must have been bandied about all these months, — years, — while she was feeling so confident that no word of it had escaped. She wondered that a rumour had

not reached her, that her circle of friends had never been narrowed by it, or that no difference had been made in her position socially. But she saw also that there was no proof, nothing to go on. The story was just one of many, arising from those rides and visits of Vibart's which might have leaked out and been coarsely handled by the men who professed to be her friends. She had heard it done with reference to other women so often that she might have expected it. She had not given much ear to like tales herself, and it was probable that others had disregarded them also. Rumour, in this case discredited, had probably touched the truth without the gossips themselves really suspecting it. Yet it stung her all the same, — not so much on her own account, as that Lanse's wife should not have been as speckless as Cæsar's. She had at least thought that she brought him a fair name from the world at large, whatever her own knowledge of herself might be. And supposing but a breath of such scandal should reach Lanse ! . . .

Beaumont Livingston dropped in to tea, and she roused herself to talk to him and be as usual. He acted somewhat like a strong stimulant upon Madge's capacities, and she felt the reward of her effort in newly-strong nerves and active brain after he left. When she retailed the little experiences of her day to Lanse, — the literal fact of her ride with Mowbray, and Livingston's call, — she was surprised to find him still somewhat restive, though his only remark was, "The inevitable military element still about, I see ! I can't quite see why you want that boy hanging round you. Of course I don't want to interfere with your amusement, dear, but I saw a good deal of Mowbray before our engagement, and he never impressed me as being particularly worthy of cultivation."

"I know — you found him in the way in those days, and resented his very existence. I don't think he has



interfered with you much since, Lanse. And I sha'n't see anything of him now, for he tells me he is very busy at Simon's Town."

She spoke wearily, for her brain was tired with contriving and planning. He came to her at once remorsefully, and took her in his arms. "You rode too far in the heat this morning, Sweetheart," he said fondly, stroking her sunshot hair. "You're tired. Never mind my nonsense — I'm a cross-grained sort of husband for you, am I not? I did n't mean it — you shall have all the boys in Camp to play with, if you like! It's only that I — well, I suppose I don't like to share you with any one else!"

"Oh, Lanse, I would n't speak to another man as long as I lived if I thought you were really vexed with me, or there were any sense in it!" Her eyes were half laughing, half wet, as they looked up between the two lines of lashes. "But indeed there isn't the least cause for you to dislike poor Miles."

She sighed, even while he kissed her, thinking how little cause he had in very truth in this case — how much in another where he knew it not!

## CHAPTER XVII

*"The Summer-time still comes though knights are dead,  
With tears of maidens rivers run to sea ;  
Love ruleth still though chivalry be fled —  
His kisses were the same to you and me.  
All was the same — from bridge to ruined mill —  
Across the stream they loved, and met to part ;  
Sad Winters change to flower-time — but still  
They call it Eden where you broke my heart."*

THE Duke's Tennis Tournament came off at the end of March, before the summer was quite over. It had been very hot, and Margery had been ailing, partly from the lassitude of the summer, and partly from the mental strain she had undergone since she heard of the probability of Vibart's return. It seemed to her that Fate closed in on her in a series of implacable statements : first, the news of his appointment was confirmed ; then she learned the boat he came by ; and after that that he had rejoined his Regiment, but without seeing him, for she did not go out for a week or two, but spent most of her time reading or dreaming in the garden of the Rosary, when she was not driving with Lanse. He was anxious about her, and nursed her as tenderly as a woman could have done, to her secret surprise. She had always looked upon him as such an intensely masculine character that this new capability came upon her as a delightful revelation. "It almost tempts me to go on being seedy," she said. "It is so lovely to be petted and looked after by you." He laughed and hoped, nevertheless, that she would pick up strength with the colder weather. "If you don't, I shall get things together with a rush, and take you Home," he threatened,

and wondered at the cordiality of his wife's, "I wish you could."

Margery meant to go to the Tournament. It would be a good opportunity for meeting Vibart and getting the dreaded moment over. She knew that it must come, and with characteristic common-sense determined to arrange it, if possible, among a large concourse of people, where there would be no least opportunity for reminiscences or any but a conventional greeting. She dreaded meeting him unexpectedly about Wynberg, or seeing him when she was unprepared, and she could trust her own nerve to carry it through if she had deliberately planned it. She knew that Lansing would not agree with any cordiality, if she asked about accepting the invitation to Camp ; but with her motive for doing so to urge her on, she did not ask, but took it for granted. Lanse said nothing, either way, when she announced to him casually that she was going to see the Tennis Tournament ; but he did not offer to accompany her.

"I suppose he will fetch me, as he always does," thought Madge, as she dressed herself on the day in question. "Well, it is better so. I shall get it all over first, before he comes, and then — he can take me home."

It was a beautiful day, a blue African day, with intense lights and shadows and an atmosphere that smelt of the sun. Down in Wynberg valley it was so hot that the oak-trees and the firs seemed to be roasting, and the red ground was hot to touch ; but it was a dry heat, and on the higher ground of the Camp a little wind went in and out among the tents and the Mess and the winding ways of the garden — True's garden, which, with the little pigs, he had delivered over to Lowndes of the Rutlandshire, when that Regiment replaced the Duke's in Camp. But True's conscientious zeal was still visible in the clean-cut garden paths, the full flower beds, and the trimmed shrubs. It was a productive spot, and

green things flourished with a little care. The Duke's had got a big tent up for tea, not far from the tennis courts, and the men's flannels and the women's summer gowns moved to and fro across the garden ways and dotted the whole scene with splashes of colour against the green background. Margery found the Tournament in full swing when she arrived; Forrester was playing with Polly Harbord against George Tennyson and Edith Hofman, which he doubtless regarded as the irony of Fate; and the men's Doubles raged between Mowbray and Silence Wright, Henderson and Scott Murray, who was known as "Hard Lines" in Wynberg, from a criticism passed on him by Teddy Barton when he became Adjutant. "It is hard lines on the Duke's having Murray as their Adjutant. Now the Rutlandshires are so fortunate, Lowndes looks like a Seraph!" Murray was certainly not beautiful to look upon, and the two descriptive titles stuck.

There were a confusing number of the Rutlandshires present besides the Duke's. Margery went straight to a group of people watching the game, amongst whom she recognised True, without allowing herself to look to left or right. She found herself in the midst of her acquaintances, — Major Yeats, True, Mrs. Drysdale, Lowndes of the Rutlandshires, and Beau Livingston. They were all laughingly backing Mowbray's energetic service, and welcomed Madge in their various fashions.

"I have been looking out for you, Lady," True said as he beamed upon her. "Will you come and have some tea?"

"Not yet. I want to watch the game a little," she said, her eyes wandering with dread and expectation amongst the little groups of onlookers. No, he was not there — yet. Was it possible that he was not coming? She almost longed to see him and get it over, this waiting was so terrible.

"Do look at Mr. Wright, Madge!" said Clarice Drys-



dale. "Don't a man's characteristics betray themselves at Tennis? Did you ever see anything so deadly as his strokes?"

"He is playing very well," remarked Yeats. "You will have to look out for your laurels, Truman, when he is your adversary. Is your husband with you, Mrs. Crofton?"

"No, I expect him to turn up presently. The last time I took him out with me, he got me away half through the afternoon. It is safer to let him appear at the end."

"Is he such a tyrant?" asked Lowndes. "It is too soon after the honeymoon, Mrs. Crofton. You should have him better in hand."

"Oh, he does n't use force!" laughed Madge. "It is moral influence. He would let me stay till midnight if I wanted to, but he stands and looks so dreadfully and meekly miserable that I feel bound to take him home at once. Besides, I am always afraid that he will yawn! Lanse is not so mightily entertained with social gatherings as I am."

"And a yawning husband is a dreadful degradation," Mrs. Drysdale agreed. "I remember going out with Ossy once, when we were just back from a long journey Up Country. Unfortunately the affair took place the same day we reached home, and we had been travelling for ten hours. I tried to reach him under the dinner-table, but it was no use. He still presented the most open countenance I ever saw to his next door neighbour. I kicked and kicked, until the pain and grief on my host's face suggested to me that I was drawing the attention of the wrong man."

"It ought to be a lesson to you," said Livingston, "not to go about attempting to improve irreclaimable human nature — knowing Ossy as well as you do, too. Mrs. Crofton is much wiser. She realises that husbands cannot be reformed, or answered for; but they can be left behind. Vibart, my dear fellow, how 's the score?"

"Forty-love in this game, three to two. Mowbray and Wright are winning. How do you do, Mrs. Crofton?"

The pleasant, easy tones were so unchanged, the handsome face was so unchanged, that it might have been but yesterday they parted in the driving rain of an August day. Margery had not seen him approaching; but as she shook hands with him and smiled, — that trained, social smile which some women can make as softly brilliant over the terrible moments of their lives as over a last new chiffon, — she looked straight at him. He was wearing a light grey suit of clothes that seemed equally well-chosen and well-cut; the voyage had tanned him becomingly; his air of smartness and animal comeliness had never been more apparent. Margery looked, and realised, and shuddered.

"How are you, Colonel Vibart?" she said carelessly. "It seems so funny to call you Colonel! I hope I sha'n't forget."

Her remark was as much to the group round her as to him. Every one laughed.

"I thought how well we were both doing it," he retorted. "I have more to remember than you. You have not only changed your title, but also — your name."

"Did you get it up beforehand?" she queried idly, her eyes wandering away to Mowbray's active figure as he flew after the balls. She wondered if he could see, — if he had noticed Vibart's approach. She remembered what he had told her, and turned sick. All these men round her had *guessed*, — half in jest they had bandied grisly truths about her from one to the other. Yet she could hardly get it home to herself even now; it seemed impossible that this big fair man standing before her, chatting easily to Mrs. Drysdale, had been . . . The old feeling of irresponsibility attacked her. It was not credible that she could have done anything serious in such sunshine, with such a blue sky overhead! Yet

she and Jack — and there was Jack, but a few feet distant! — had. . . .

“Suppose we go and look at the other courts?” she said to Major Yeats suddenly. “I want to see if Polly is winning.”

“She will have a hard task against Tennyson and Miss Hofman,” he returned, as they strolled off, side by side, up through the beds where the autumn violets were already beginning to show, and the summer roses growing scarcer, to the higher courts, where Mrs. Johnnie and Starling and Valentine Cayley were all sitting on a rustic seat, indulging in criticism and desultory conversation. They made room for Madge at once, and she sat down, surprised to find that her knees were trembling. The meeting had been a strain on her, natural and uneventful as it had been. It had passed off exactly as she intended, but she had now to prevent either references or speech with Vibart alone. There was no room for Yeats on the seat, and he stood and looked down on her, his eye-glass stuck firmly in his eye, more of a Du Maurier figure than ever, with his hands behind his back.

“Have you been overdoing it lately, Mrs. Crofton?” he said. “You ought to beware of the heat.”

“No, indeed, I have hardly been anywhere. This afternoon is my first dissipation for weeks. Did you go to the dolls’ show, Starling?”

“Yes, we made up a big party, and bought extensively. I hear the receipts were beyond the Missions’ greatest hopes.”

“Who was with you?”

“Oh, Polly Harbord, and the Redmaynes, and True, and a contingent from Simon’s Town. True carried home the dolls for us, and would kiss them all for good-night. We were so afraid he would kiss the paint off.”

“He must have been hard up!” laughed Madge.

"I was sorry to miss the show. I have not been well lately."

"Get your husband to take you Home," advised Yeats, briefly. "How long have you been out? Two years? You ought to get a change now. People don't feel it at first, but there comes a time when one wants to get out of Africa."

His thoughtful, rugged face was turned from Madge to the players; but she wondered for a moment what he meant — if there were something more in his words than the obvious meaning. She remembered that old far-away discussion with him at the *Beatrice* dance, when he had quoted Browning to her. She had re-read the poem since, many times, and thought it might have been a warning, were it not a chance coincidence. But had it been? —

"Where the apple reddens  
Never pry —  
Lest we lose our Edens,  
Eve and I!"

Did he suspect something too? Did the whole world — her world — know? She felt as if she were being hard-pressed, hunted, enclosed in a net. It was a relief to her to see True approaching, and to find that he had come to renew his offer of tea. Starling had already disappeared tent-wards with V. C., and Madge and True followed them.

"It is a nuisance having no courts at Simon's Town," he said. "That's the worst of being under canvas! We've got a Mess at last, though."

"No, have you? How did you manage it?"

"It's a house. A man offered it to us, we were so pathetically homeless. I think it was Pete, — he always looked hungry, and he confided to our Good Samaritan landlord that he had n't dined in comfort for a month. Mind the flap of the tent, Lady!"

Margery stooped her head, and went in. It was so



shady inside that after the glare of the sunlight she could not see who was present. A long table ran down the centre, loaded with teacups and urns and cakes, and the Duke's dodged to and fro, acting alternately as waiters and dispensers of tea and coffee. Margery leaned against the table and blinked at the chattering, moving figures, while True attended to her wants.

"Shall I get you some tea, Lady?" he said.

"Yes, please," she returned. "And some cake — and don't forget the sugar. Two lumps!"

"Sweets to the sweet!" he smiled, as he dropped them in.

"Don't be obvious," said Madge, calmly. "What is that cake, True? Is it polo?"

"Made especially for you. I saw to it myself."

"You will say you made it next. Can you cook, by the way?"

He nodded. "I can fry fish and broil chops. I learned when we were out for the manœuvres."

"Very well. My cook is going because he got tipsy one night and dished up fruit stones instead of beans, and Lanse said that if we were to be poisoned it might as well be done by a competent person." Her laugh broke through her next words, and made an accompaniment to them. "I thought Thomas was very competent. I am sure the fruit stones were well calculated to finish off anybody! However, there was a great fuss, and Lanse locked him up in the stables until he got sober. Then he told him what he thought, and knocked him down; because he said it was no use knocking him down while he was tipsy, he would never get up again. And now Thomas is going, and I've asked Major Yeats and Captain Ransom to dinner next week. Will you come and cook?"

"I will do anything in the world for you!" said True, softly, gazing into her eyes with rapt devotion.

"What a truly Trumanian speech!" exclaimed Madge,

between her laughter. "Captain Ransom, when you come to dinner at the Rosary next week, True is going to cook it!"

The Drawler was pouring out tea for Mrs. Johnnie, in a fashion peculiarly his own. He half filled the cup with strong tea, and then dashed in the milk as if he thought to weaken it by quantity and force.

"Oh, Lord!" he said. "Mrs. Crofton, if that is the case, I shall take another fellow's duty!"

"Is it so bad as that? He says he can cook."

"So he can — but you can't eat the stuff afterwards. We had a dish once that he called Irish stew — it came up soup."

"But, by Jove! it was a very nourishing soup," put in Tennyson, commencing an onslaught on the sponge cake. "I never met with anything so sustaining. I wanted nothing more, and the Colonel — he was only Major then — said —"

Madge turned suddenly to True; he was smiling contentedly, listening to the conversation, and with that air of awaiting her pleasure that always beset him with women.

"I think, on the whole, you would make a better waiter than cook," she said. "It always reassures me so to know that you are near me at a meal. I feel that every sense you have is concentrated on my plate, and that it is no sooner empty than it will be full again."

"Let me get you some more biscuits now," he said. "You like sugar biscuits, I know. Drawler, just move that plate. If the Bard eats any more sponge cake he will miss his balls next set."

Tennyson made a snatch as Ransom attempted to take the plate, whirled round backwards with his booty, and came in collision with a heavy body. "I beg your pardon, sir!" he said. For it was Vibart.

"Good Heavens, Tennyson! what are you doing?"

said the Colonel. Then his eyes went further down the table. "Have you had tea, Mrs. Crofton?" he said. "This seems to be rather a dangerous neighbourhood—I hope they have not been charging into you also with plates of cake."

"No thanks, I have been offered food in a less formidable fashion. Captain Truman has attended to my every want."

That was all. They met each other's eyes again for a moment with apparent unconcern, and Madge turned again to True.

"I've finished," she said. "Take me away, please, I feel fat! And there are heaps of people waiting for our places. Poor things, how hungry they look."

She nodded to Mrs. Johnnie as True lifted the canvas for her to pass out.

"Oh, Madge!" said the latter, "I forgot to tell you that I met your husband on the way here, and offered him a lift. He looked so tired! I think he was coming back from Constantia, I suppose he spends a lot of time there?"

"He is over at the farm most mornings," said Madge, pausing. "What did he say?"

"He would n't accept my offer—he said he was n't coming to Camp, he was going to have a ride."

For a moment Margery's blue eyes looked big and piteous with dismay. But the tent was dusky, and she lowered her lids.

"Oh, I daresay he thought the Kaisir needed exercise—I did n't see him before I came out, but I expect that is it. It's our new horse, Mrs. Johnnie,—Lanse fusses over it like a mother. I tell him he gives more time to the Kaisir now than to me!"

She bent her head and followed True out of the tent into the sunshine which had lost its gold. So he was not coming to fetch her! The little slight stung Madge far more than downright anger would have done. She

knew he did not like her going to Camp,—she had rather avoided seeing him before she started, on this account, fearing that he might say something to deter her,—but she had taken it for granted that he would come and fetch her. That his displeasure would manifest itself in this way, had never occurred to her. And now she must drive home alone.

“I don’t care!” she thought indignantly. “I won’t care! Lanse is silly—why should he go off and leave me to myself like this? Well, I shall do my best to enjoy myself. I did n’t want to come—I had to. He need n’t think I wanted to, goodness knows!” Then she pulled herself up, remembering that her motive in coming had been one which she could never explain, however excellent it was to her.

True led the way along the winding walks between the flowery beds, and Madge followed him, chatting in a desultory fashion, while he picked white violets for her, and made them into a tiny bouquet in his own deft fashion.

“I am almost sorry I am wearing a white gown; they will hardly show against it,” she said. “Put plenty of leaves, True, the green will throw them up. How are the pigs?”

“Very well—too well for Mr. Lowndes’ peace of mind! They escaped again the other night. They always get out on Sunday. I think they must want to go to church. He told me he had to pursue them, cursing!”

“How very wrong for the Seraph. I like the idea of Mr. Lowndes as a swine-herd.”

“I would take you to see them, but I have to collect the players for the next set.” He handed her the violets, outlined in their green leaves, and then paused,—she wondered if there were a significance about it, afterwards,—and remarked quietly, “Here is the Colonel!”

But Madge had heard his heavy step on the gravel,



some minutes before, and did not start. He had come up between the flower beds, winding in and out of the walks, as if hardly following them; indeed Madge had watched, with fascinated eyes, as he made an idle *détour*, and almost sauntered away from them — almost — only to return. The Tracker was stalking.

“Robbing the Rutlandshires, Mrs. Crofton?” he said, in his usual pleasant manner, as he reached them. “The garden has come on finely, has n’t it? We miss it, over at Simon’s Town. Truman, they are giving the defaulter’s call for you, for not getting the players together. Don’t hurry, my dear fellow, let them look after themselves for a bit. They will appreciate you all the more.”

But True had turned away, though without haste, and disappeared down the slope to the courts. He was gone before Margery had collected herself to follow him. She stood where she was, by the border, half in sun and half in shadow, fastening the violets into her breast.

Vibart watched her. They were alone for the minute, and he lowered his voice with a faculty she knew well. “Have you quite forgotten?” he said.

She made a slight backward movement, involuntarily. During their intimacy he had taught her to carry on a double conversation with him, by means of dropping the voice at the end of an audible commonplace, and adding words of far greater import, in order that they might be able to talk to each other when a third person was present. Vibart was an adept in the art, which Madge speedily caught, and they sometimes used it even when at the moment alone, if there were a chance of their being taken by surprise. Margery mechanically dropped into it now, raising her voice to comment on his last remark to True, before she lowered it to answer him direct.

“Do you think people ever really appreciate a delayed blessing? — (I have not forgotten, but I am truly sorry to remember!)”

He continued with the same caution. "I did n't exactly call Truman a blessing, even though delayed. (Your marriage was a great surprise to me.)"

"He is Umpire, I suppose?—(It may be a greater surprise to you to hear that I love my husband!)" The lowered voice was defiant now.

"Yes, I believe so — (You might have written and told me. You never answered my letters.)"

"He must have his hands full — (I thought it better not.)"

"I believe Truman likes it — (Your affection is not a very lasting thing, is it?)"

The words were a reproach rather than a taunt, but they roused Madge to desperation. She must speak now and defend herself, if it were to be done effectually. She almost felt as if she were defending Lanse — she was, in any case, defending what was dearest to her in all the world, the safe-guarding of his love. She did not care if she hurt, she did not mind if she were brutal or hard. Her sensations were probably those of the historical rat in the corner, who, turned to bay, becomes the aggressor rather than the defendant. She abandoned the precaution of her trivial remarks about True, but lowered her voice to one level as she spoke.

"I want you to understand, now and once for all, that all feeling I ever had for you is dead. I love my husband with my whole heart, and I never wish to cast a thought beyond him. I can hardly realise, now, that I ever professed any affection for you — I am very sorry I did, for it has utterly vanished. Will you please understand, for the future, that we are the merest casual acquaintances, and the less we see of each other the better."

There was no time to say any more — she had hardly time to get the cold, hurried sentences out as it was — for Captain Ransom and Beau Livingston joined them, even as she finished. Madge's only anxiety was lest Vibart should not have understood. She feared that, in

her haste, she might have lost the weight she meant her words to have. But surely he must have understood ! He was far too much of a man of the world to approach her again if he had, she knew. She did not care that she had spoken with such terrible directness. If it answered her purpose, she was only relieved. The incident was done with, closed, once and forever, and she pushed it roughly out of her life.

Livingston and Vibart turned, by common consent, and went off to the Mess, where two or three of the Rutlandshires promptly plied them with liquor brandy, and A. W. cigarettes, which they had but lately brought from Egypt. As Beau blew the heavy fumes through his fine nostrils, he sighed with satisfaction.

"It is a melancholy fact that tobacconists cannot bring themselves to import the best cigarettes," he remarked. "A true Egyptian, my dear Jack, is beyond all price—it is made up of every vice under the sun, and flavoured with tobacco; whereas the imitations offered me, even in Bond Street, were really made up of tobacco and the flavour of vice was only irritating."

"What are these? Argyropulo, Weanings, are n't they? I have been spoiling my palate with cigars on board."

"It is a pity to spoil one's palate in any way. The difficulty of retaining an appetite is bad enough," Beau glanced at his companion as he spoke. Their eyes met, and they laughed. "Have you seen the 'Owl' this week?" the elder man went on.

"No! Anything good?"

"This—" he began to tell a story; as he reached the point, Lowndes came into the Mess with a party of ladies whom he had brought to see the Mess-plate.

"—and so my friend *shot* the tiger in the jungle!" said Beau, blandly. The woman nearest him turned her head with covert interest, as if she suspected hair-breadth escapes, and regretted the first part of the ad-

venture. Vibart nearly laughed. "Come out onto the stoep; our cigars may not be welcome," he suggested, politely, and they strolled off by themselves, increasing their reputations for courtesy in the feminine eyes that looked after them with appreciation.

"Did you notice that woman who wanted to hear the rest of the Owlsh story?" said Beau, quietly. "Handsome, is n't she?"

"Who is she?"

"A Mrs. Jackson — her husband has a civil appointment. They are newcomers." He blew a ring of smoke and looked at Vibart. "Margery Crofton has altered a good deal, has n't she?" he said.

"She looks just as young."

"She has developed, though. She is five times as attractive as she was two years ago."

"I hear her husband is a Johannesburg man."

"Well, no. Emphatically English as a fact. He made his money there or in Rhodesia; but the smell of the making does not stick to him. I was rather surprised to find Madge married — she did it when my back was turned, which is a bad habit by the way, — but I think it is all for the best."

"She was always a nice little girl," Vibart said quietly. He was not spiteful.

"She has become very charming. When she has got over the influence of the honeymoon, she may be dangerously so. At present she is mentally in an attitude of devotion before her husband. Some women are subject to it. Fortunately, however, the inborn mischief in Madge will betray itself later on. Then we shall see."

If the well-mannered, well-bred gentleman known as Beau Livingston had been possessed by Mephistopheles, he could not have calculated the weaknesses of his Marguerite more exactly. He had always known where Madge could be reckoned upon to play with fire, and the knowledge had caused him great diversion. He



acknowledged her innocent enough in intention, and full of good resolutions ; but it amused him to see sheer vitality and high spirits betraying the earnestness of the saint.

Vibart, with the sting of his late rebuff still upon him, could hardly agree with Beau's prophecy ; but he would have liked to have done so none the less. Madge's marriage had been, at the first telling, a sore to his vanity, but when he got more used to the thought he comforted himself with the philosophy that it was just what might have been expected, and it need not alter their relations. Indeed, he came to think that Crofton might be a useful though unconscious ally, and took a pleasurable anticipation in the thought of meeting Madge again. He was deterred from making an active move towards that end by the fact that she had never answered his letters, and also that her marriage rather removed her from his immediate influence. But he looked forward to seeing her personally, without any doubt as to the result. Her downright words had been something of a shock, and, in spite of his reluctance, he recognised the genuineness of her attitude towards himself, and her determination to see no more of him. He thought, rather savagely, that possibly his own teaching was being revenged upon him now. He had always impressed the brevity of human affections upon Madge, and she was giving him a practical demonstration of his own creed. He was too successful a man to accept his own defeat as final after the first repulse ; but he was too prudent not to draw back at present, and wait.

"She's chucked me in good earnest just now," he said in his heart. "And my expectations of going on where we left off are rather rudely dispelled. . . . She's prettier than ever ! . . . I wonder what the other fellow is like ? Ten chances to one he's an ugly brute, as a contrast to Me. Women generally rush off to the other extreme, if they've been attracted by looks first. . . . I

wish I could get Madge all to myself on a few occasions — I could always get her to hear reason if we had a good talk — and no fear of interruption ! I wonder if I could make her jealous again ? It 's no good trying Blanche as a decoy. She got over that before, and did n't care a hang about her before I left for England."

" Shall I introduce you to Mrs. Jackson ? " Beau said airily.

" Ah, yes ! I should like to know her ! " Vibart answered promptly. " Thanks, for the offer ! " He had a great respect for the Devil, as that gentleman had before this occasion answered the requests he had hardly formulated in his mind, and invariably rendered him every assistance in his power.

Margery went home by herself, as she had predicted. Mowbray walked by the side of the cart to the limits of the Camp, after the immemorial custom of the moth and the candle, and then Madge whipped up the pony and the dog-cart swung out into the road, and she trotted home under the fir-trees. Lanse had sent the cart up for her, though he had not come himself ; she was glad he had kept to the outward courtesy at least, she thought grimly, with her lips set and her blue eyes fixed on the lovely Eden-like prospect of green hill and valley rising and falling round her. She was thankful at heart for one thing, in spite of the secret vexation of the afternoon, — that the meeting with Vibart was over, and that she had come to some sort of understanding with him. It was an infinite relief, and she could even afford to forgive Lanse.

He was not in when she came home, but she heard him come up to his dressing-room while she was changing her own gown, and they met at the dinner-table. Madge was coolly indifferent, and Lanse was polite. He inquired who had won the match, so far, — for it was to last over two days, — and said what a beautiful afternoon it had been. Then he relapsed into silence. At first

Madge wanted to laugh ; then she felt injured — then, with sudden dismay, she realised that this might develop to a first quarrel. She looked at the strong, concentrated face opposite her, the set mouth, and the eyes which quietly ignored her, and she saw that the qualities which had made her husband a successful man were just now combining to resist her weaker will. When the coffee was brought to them on the stoep, she rose suddenly and going up to him laid her hand on his shoulder.

“Lanse, why did n’t you come and fetch me this afternoon?” she said.

“I thought you probably had a sufficient escort.”

“I did n’t want any one but you.”

“Thanks, I don’t care to enter into competition with your other friends.”

He had said the same thing once before they were engaged, she remembered half impatiently. “I think it was very unkind of you ! ” she said suddenly.

“Really? It would hardly have occurred to me to use so strong a word. I only went my own way — as you had gone yours.”

She looked across the soft warm night for an instant ; it was unusually windless and relaxing, and the crickets were singing. . . . Driven by a relentless memory of whose force he could not dream, she turned from the eternal ghost of her former self brought up by the familiarity of the night, and sinking on her knees laid her head against his shoulder.

“Lanse dearest, if you don’t like it, I will never go to Camp again ! ” she said almost passionately.

He was totally unprepared for her attitude or words, and for a moment he hesitated. Then the soft head on his shoulder found its way to his breast, and his arms closed round her as if without his will.

“Do you think me unreasonable?” he said after a minute.

"No — only I did n't know you would really mind, or of course I would n't have done it."

"I did mind. It cut me awfully to have you go off like that, as if you were totally indifferent and independent of me. If you had asked me to come too, I would have taken you with pleasure."

"Oh, Lanse, I took it for granted that you would fetch me as usual!" she stammered, remembering that she had not wished him to come until later — when she had got it over.

"I don't like your knocking about alone amongst all those men," he said apologetically.

"Mrs. Johnnie was there, and ever so many other women. Never mind, I know now — I won't do it again." She thought with relief that she had accomplished her real aim, and should have no second cause. For a second they neither of them spoke. His hand was playing restlessly with her hair, as she leaned on his breast, feeling thankful in her heart that the difficulty was over.

"Madge," he said abruptly, "*why* did you go alone, and not ask me to come with you?"

Her heart stood still; she was afraid he would feel it throb the next moment, and drew herself almost imperceptibly a shade further off. "My dear boy, I never meant to!" she said with the fluency of her terror. "I thought, of course, you did n't want to come, as you always get tired and restless when you stay through these affairs — I expected you to fetch me as usual."

"I suppose you think me a suspicious brute, even for the idea," he acknowledged. "But I have been wondering all the afternoon if you could have a reason. Don't think I'm blaming you — but I daresay you get more fun when you have n't a husband hanging about in the background."

Mowbray's words, "And of course you do flirt!" recurred to her mind. She felt as if Lanse's reluctant



suspensions reopened the gate of the past that she had thought so firmly closed.

"I think you might trust me better," was all she said gently. "I don't think I wait till your back is turned, and then begin a flirtation, Lanse!"

"I beg your pardon, dearest, — I know it sounded as if I were insulting you." He was honestly remorseful, and his caresses became more demonstrative. It cost Madge a pang to realise that if she had been another woman she might have been justly hurt, and kept up her dignity to punish him; but her sense of justice and honesty really prevented her resenting his words as she half wanted to do.

"Lanse, do you know that we came to the verge of a quarrel?" she said rather gravely after a minute.

"I know. I was awfully mad with you, Madge!"

"Oh, don't let us risk it again!" she cried in sudden fear. "Whatever happens, let us try to avoid that. We should drift apart. You would wrap yourself up in your reserve, and, however sorry I grew, after a time I shouldn't be able to make you understand. And I'm hot tempered too, and spoilt I daresay. Lanse, if you are vexed with me, tell me so straight out, and why. I may be angry and argue and defend myself, but it will be better — we sha'n't go on nursing our bitterness anyhow."

He was a little ashamed of himself, and inclined to spoil her now. "I won't have you maligning yourself," he said. "You are the best tempered little soul under the sun! I am a sullen brute, I know, and vindictive. Madge, we won't drift apart. We'll remember this threatening of a row, and our reconciliation. Let's go somewhere to-morrow all by ourselves, and have a kind of honeymoon again, just for the day. The social life here has come in between us a little. Have you anything on?"

"Nothing I could n't put off — I would put it off anyhow." It was the second day of the Tournament, but

she did not even refer to that. "Let's go for a ride, Lanse, all by ourselves."

"Very well, only we must n't overdo it. You have n't been strong lately."

"Where shall we go? Out to Simon's Town, or Tokai, or where?"

"No, they're all too public and crowded. I'll tell you what—I'll take you over to Hout's Bay. It's about the only place we never went to while we were engaged. I was there one day last week, and I thought what a pretty little place it was. Besides it's as lonely as the Karroo now."

Margery put his arms away from her, and got up as if tired with kneeling. Her eyes went away over the soft starlit night where the crickets sang. She said nothing.

"Would n't you like it, Madge?"

"Oh, yes—I think it would be lovely! I was only thinking it was rather a long way—I have n't ridden much lately."

"Oh, well, we won't ride—I'll drive you over. That would be better, perhaps, in this heat."

"But I thought you wanted to ride—"

"I only want to be with you, away from every one else. I don't care a hang how I get there!"

"But, Lanse, there are excursions every day, and heaps of tourists there, are n't there?"

"Not so late in the season. There may be a few at the Hotel, but we can get away from them on the beach. We'll go down in the morning, and come home to supper. You don't know Hout's Bay well, do you?"

"Not very well," she said hopelessly. The saving clause was his making a day of it; if he had proposed staying the night, she felt that at all risks she must have refused. The mere contemplation drove her mad. It was the one spot in the neighbourhood which she had always avoided, and so successfully that for nearly two

years she had never been as far as the Nek even. Before Vibart left, while she was still meeting him secretly, they had several times ridden out that way together, but never as far as the Bay again. All her memories of the road were, however, connected with him, and she made up her mind to the pain and humiliation of the excursion beforehand. Supposing that Eve had never tempted Adam to share the forbidden fruit, but had kept her knowledge and her sin to herself, would not her punishment have been as great or greater, though she still dwelt in Eden, and only her shamed heart knew that God had placed His Angel at the gates of her lost innocence ! The Serpent would never have told, — he was not the betrayer of the secret, — Adam would never have known, — God might have waited for her confession with His terrible patience ; but the condemnation would have been just as completely carried out, and Paradise lost to her, though she was actually within it.

Margery felt a dim surprise that the various features of the road were so familiar to her ; they seemed to have been so impressed on her brain that it might have been only last week she took this same journey in the hired cart, with the inscrutable silent figure of Caroline beside her. She wondered what became of that woman — the one witness whom she had to fear, for the Hotel people knew nothing of the connection between her and Vibart. They had stayed there the same night ; but as strangers to each other on the face of things. She looked round her dreamily as they drove through the sun and shadow of the firs — past the red and golden fields of Constantia — up through the whispering silver-trees — over the Nek, leaving Wynberg behind them in the cup of the hills, and descending into the wilder and more African country towards the Bay. It was all of a dreadful sameness with the past, though when they drew up in the sand before the Hotel the broad sunlight blazed on mountain-side and bare big house, and

drew shadows of the oak-trees in black and gold, instead of black and silver, across the dusty ground. Crofton lifted her down out of the cart, and Madge walked slowly into the Hotel to wait for him ; she thought for a minute that one of the servants looked at her curiously, but she kept her face studiously under control.

There were a party of excursionists to lunch in the large room where she had dined with Caroline, — one of the big Cape Town firms had brought down their employees for the day. Madge and Crofton amused themselves with watching and remarking on them, while they ate their luncheon. The drive had given him an appetite; but Madge struggled to swallow her food in vain. At any moment it seemed to her she would start to find the broad midday, the tourists, her husband himself, only a dream ; it would be night, with a single chandelier burning at one end of the room, herself seated at the little table in the window with that strange woman opposite her, and on the further side of the room another visitor who hardly exchanged a glance with her, and yet she knew him to be a big handsome man in riding dress, who was eating his dinner as unconcernedly as though there were no electric chord of mutual understanding between them. . . .

“Let’s get out of this, and go down to the sea, darling,” Lanse said. Margery pushed her plate away, and followed him with relief.

At least this part of the excursion was strange to her. The path was rugged and steep, and they walked slowly in the midday heat. It struggled upwards, along the face of the mountain-side, skirting the Bay, into which they looked down as at a picture. White sand and olive-green trees, a few houses built absolutely into the sand, a group of fisher cottages on the further side of the Bay, a ring of blue sea, and white surf rolling in round the smooth, warm-coloured rocks. They skirted a headland, and came out above the further bay, past the wild



scrub and undergrowth where some Kaffir children were calling to each other, their voices breaking clearly into the golden quiet of the afternoon. Then the path dipped half-way down the cliff, and Madge and Lanse took hands like two children themselves, and sauntered on together until a perfect solitude contented them, and they sat down on the grass beyond the path, — it was little more than a track, — in the shadow of the mountain-side, and overlooking the sunny seas.

“How perfect, and how lonely!” she said clasping her two hands round her knees. He lay beside her with his head against her arm, and looked out across the world also.

“Just you and me, and no one else,” he said, putting her thought into words.

“If we could only stay so!”

“We can’t; but we’ve had it, and we shall always know it’s there, waiting for us if we want it, now. This can’t run away.”

“Lanse, does n’t it make you feel little? This has always been here, — it always will be here, — never mind who comes and looks at it. If we were the first inhabitants, savages, or the Dutch, or ourselves, or future generations of any Nation, it would be just as lovely for them!”

“I wonder what will be the future of South Africa! It’s a big country, Madge, and it’s got big resources. It will come nearer England every year with these record passages. There may come a day, though not in our time, when people will run over to the Cape for a holiday, instead of to the Continent. Then Hout’s Bay will be like Boulogne or Dieppe!” He laughed at his own fancy, contrasted with the lovely loneliness of the Bay far down beneath his feet.

“Fancy a parade down there!” said Madge. “And a bandstand! The sea anemones would curl up and die with disgust, and those lovely coloured seaweeds

would all disappear, and the maidenhair growing over the little streams among the rocks (Starling and I came down here once and found such treasures on the beach!) would be used for penny button-holes! Ugh! how horrid!"

"I wonder if they would make the button-holes of prickly pear or sugar-bushes!" laughed Lanse. "Things grow rather too large in Africa to adapt themselves to pocket luxuries!"

"I am more interested in the future of your wine farm, than in Africa, after all," said Madge. "I have a commercial mind. Don't let's go back to the Hotel for tea, Lanse. I am not a bit hungry out here in the blue and gold!"

"You will be later, what with mountain and sea air. We can have it before we start homewards, about six. The sun will be going down then."

"It will be a dark drive," remarked Madge, contentedly. She was very happy, and she had learned to hoard her happiness from moment to moment, so often had it been threatened of late. They sat there in the ripening afternoon, without speaking; but she was conscious that he had moved nearer her to touch her, and the human contact gave the one note of comfort wanted in the vast beauty of the solitary place. The old influence of the great land was upon her; she felt Africa again, as she had done on that former fateful night. Strange that the soul of the country always seemed more demonstrative and apparent here, in this little insignificant corner of the Peninsula. It was but a crack in the Continent, a tiny Bay in a tag of land jutting out from the great bulk itself; yet it seemed to Madge more real and impressive than anything she knew save the blank spaces of the Karroo.

They sat and watched the sun get lower, talking in a desultory fashion now and then. As the liquid glory touched the cliff to their left, they grew more silent;

then it reached the water and rippled towards them along a wide path of blue sea, and then Lanse raised himself from his recumbent position to his knees.

"Come, dear, we must be going," he said. He was still kneeling before her, and in the sacrament of the descending light he took her face in his hands and kissed her. "I love you!" he said, as if he had found a new beauty in the words, and was awed by the wonder of his own feeling. Madge did not answer. She kissed him across the grief of her past and its secret. That shadow lay between them for all their lives, — she knew it in the moment, and wondered with pain if it would reach after her into another existence. Are all deeds so irradicable, so implacable in their consequences? she thought. Can we never lose touch with our past selves? Lanse caught the look on her face and said to himself, "She is a woman. She was a girl when I married her. I have felt her growing older for some time; but I did not realise that she was only developing, as marriage develops all women. Her face is altering a little — there is more in it." There was, — but it was a mental experience, and no mere physical one, that had wrought the change. He could teach her body nothing that it did not know; but her mind and soul were responsive to his touch. He held the key of them. Could he but have appreciated it, — but then he must have been more than a man, — it was a greater gain than the loss he did not know he had sustained.

They went back along the mountain track, holding each other's hands again like the children. The light was getting low as they rounded the cliff. Madge uttered a little soft exclamation, as reverent as though she stood before a great work of art in a cathedral. For if she looked to the right, it was like Switzerland, the white sand that had drifted far up the hills gleaming like snow under the pinky flush, the Little Lion couchant, as a sentinel, and the long line of rocky heights which ended

in Table Mountain guarding the Bay ; but if she looked to the left, beyond Hout's Bay into the further bay above which they had been sitting, it was surely Cornwall, for nowhere else does one see that vivid, broken line of coast, with the warm-coloured cliffs and the torn white spray dashed up so high over the great rocks that it almost seemed like a cloud against the intense green of the vegetation ; and yet again, if she looked right out beyond the land-locked Bay, behold it was Italy, as deeply, royally blue as Naples, with the speckless sky that hangs over Venice. And all this in one corner of our despised, beautiful Africa, which is said to be nothing but a sunburnt rock ! Something in the disdainful line of the granite mountains scorns the calumny.

It was a dark drive home, as Madge had predicted ; but the lights came out under the firs of Constantia, and she sat close to Lanse, too full of the moment's peace and rest from her usual fear to want to talk. She had closed her eyes and ears to memory in the short time of their return to the Hotel, which would have seemed like a repetition of her former visit. To her own surprise, she was almost sorry that the day was over. She had looked forward to it as to a pain that must be borne, but the experience of the afternoon had no forerunner to darken it, and she stored it up as a pure bright space in her life. She could feel that Lanse was happy too, by some occult sympathy. He had no doubts of her, for this hour at least, and his left hand closed on hers under the rug, while he held the reins with his right. If it could have been always like this ! she thought. If only no dread of dead passions had come to shake her security ! How little women, who had no such cause for fear, realised their own great blessing !

Lanse jumped down at his own gates, and lifted her out tenderly. There was a little added touch of possession about him, to which she felt warmly responsive. It was almost as if he brought her home for the first time.



"We *have* drifted apart a little," she thought with a panic of recognition. "It is the secret between us, which he feels and cannot explain. Oh, what a horrible punishment for me if it parted us, though I never betrayed it! Pray God I won't let it though. Last night's threatened quarrel brought about a better understanding." — "Letters!" she said aloud brightly, taking up a pile from the hall table. "Quite a lot! Two for you from Johannesburg, Lanse, one for me from Starling (that was left by hand), one actually from Anthony!" She broke the last envelope, and read it, standing there. Then she turned back and re-read it. Then she gave a little laugh that was half a gasp, and laid her hand on Lanse's arm to draw his attention, for he was deep in his own correspondence.

"Lanse, prepare for a shock!" she said. "What do you think has happened? Anthony is going to marry Blanche Cromo Dame!"

They stared at each other blankly for a moment, and then burst into simultaneous mirth.

"Well, I'm damned!" remarked Lanse, feelingly. "I beg your pardon, Madge, but I am too surprised to choose my words. Let me look at the letter — yes, by Jove! no doubt about it. Well! . . ."

"Blanche is a clever woman," remarked Margery, with a half humorous tightening of her lips. "Well, I hope they will be happy — I really do! I can hardly grasp the idea, though. But I say, Lanse! —"

"Well?"

"I really don't know which I am the most sorry for! I think, however, that it's Blanche."

## CHAPTER XVIII

*"Fit sire was he of a selfish race,  
Who first to temptation yielded,  
Then to mend his case tried to heap disgrace  
On the woman he should have shielded.  
Say! comrade mine, the forbidden fruit  
We'd have plucked, that I well believe,  
But I trust we'd rather have suffered mute  
Than have laid the blame upon Eve."*

THE Professor could not be said to be a comfortable object in his position of fiancé. There was something furtive and uneasy about him on the few occasions when he appeared in the train of his prospective wife, and his smile on receiving congratulations was more suggestive of some inward spasm than irrepressible joy. Margery swallowed her amazement, and expressed her hope that they would be happy with real cordiality. She had a cultivated liking for Blanche, and foresaw that the Hand-painted Lady would be a satisfactory connection, being far too wise a woman to encourage family quarrels or recriminations. The only satire in which Margery indulged at her brother's expense was to remark to him dryly that she felt glad she had proved so satisfactory a housekeeper that he found his household unbearable after her departure! To which the Professor retorted that his wife would be in a slightly different position to that which she had held.

"Oh — yes!" said Margery, thoughtfully. "I hope Blanche will find the difference profitable!"

Mrs. Cromo Dame took four months to arrange her affairs and provide her trousseau, and married the Professor at the end of July. The intervening time passed

smoothly for Margery. No new complications arose to threaten her Paradise, and the exercise of a little prudence held the balance between her social life and Lansing. It was improbable that such factors in his wife's existence as Wynberg Camp and Beaumont Livingston would ever recommend themselves to him ; but without entirely discarding her amusements, Margery contrived to keep what she valued far more, his companionship and confidence. She was inclined to lift up her head again, and to whisper to herself that the Gods had forgotten their vengeance, and she might dwell in security.

The chief disturbance, as also the chief interest just then, lay in the political situation. Margery heard it discussed on all sides, among those whose views coincided, and heard also the private opinions of men who could weigh the Imperial Government and the Transvaal Government, and spoke strongly. There was a loosening of the cords of the Empire in those days, and the Colonists shut their lips and awaited Great Britain's decision before they would commit themselves. The undercurrent of excitement touched even the social life ; Margery felt it, and felt the indecision of those whose interest lay in Africa, while their sentiments were as a link with the Mother Country which might snap beneath the strain. Cape Colony was loyal in the main, except in the ultra Dutch districts ; but the very practical qualities which make the English the best builders of an empire, prevent their sacrificing sense to sentimentalism. " We have colonised for England, — we have established ourselves here, and increased her prosperity, — what is she going to do for us now ? Will she assert herself, or will she lose her prestige in South Africa, and leave us stranded ? Better a United South Africa, fighting for itself, than an incapable Government," said the Colony. The most British portion of the population chafed under the delay of that terrible period,

while two Governments played at Conferences, and the whole Empire stood looking on gravely, and Europe screamed itself hoarse without understanding or judgment. At times the larger question was broken into by side issues, and local interests, as on the morning when all the suburbs hummed with the news of Sauer's stoppage of the trains, and the probable arrival of the Progressives too late to vote at Vryburg. The papers flamed over it, and party feeling ran higher than ever against the stolid Bond party. The failure of the commission brought a lull, and the social round went on as usual again, and the regiments chafed, and rumours of troops being sent to the Border were rife. But July came in with its cold and wet, and things were still undecided on the day when Anthony Cunningham was married.

A winter wedding is less attractive than a summer one. There was a chilly feeling in the rooms at the Rosary, where Madge and Lanse had undertaken the wedding breakfast, and the guests seemed to find a greater attraction in the cheerful fires than in the garden, though the sun shone fitfully at intervals.

"Not such a wedding-day as mine!" thought Madge, as she moved to and fro chattering to her friends. "But, oh, how thankful I am that it did not have to be at Vine Lodge! It is bad enough having Jack Vibart here, — it is the first time he has been under this roof. I wish he had not accepted Anthony's invitation."

Vibart was, however, very much present, and entirely at his ease, — handsome and well-dressed, smiling with a cynicism that was without bitterness upon the bridegroom's sister and the bride herself, with both of whom he had been on peculiar terms. Margery felt she loathed herself as the situation flashed upon her, — Jack, Blanche, and herself! She could hardly persuade herself that if he had succeeded with a perfectly ignorant girl, whose very innocence presented certain difficulties,



that he had not been met half way by such a woman as Blanche. Bah ! how cheap it made her feel ! how it coarsened the relations between men and women, making even marriage a kind of mockery. She did not condemn Blanche ; a certain power of reason made Margery broad-minded enough to allow people to judge for themselves ; but she suffered a new humiliation from Vibart's mere presence. Why had he come ? Surely he must have known that she would never have sent him the invitation if Anthony had not requested it. Vibart had called at the Rosary once when Madge had been out ; the circumstance had not struck her much, for she put it down to caution on his part, lest his not calling should have a particular look from their being old acquaintances. Once or twice, also, he had attempted to talk to her when they met at the houses of mutual friends, — attempts which she had supposed were due to his natural proclivity for pretty women, and frustrated. Now it occurred to her suddenly that he might not be as completely finished with as she had fancied. Perhaps he had never really understood the finality of her attitude ! She kept her eyes studiously away from him, and entrenched herself among her guests, up to the moment when Blanche came to say good-bye previous to departing for Durban.

"Come and see us as soon as we get home," she said to Madge with cordial affection and much frankness. "I expect I shall be nearly dead of wanting some one to speak to !"

"Oh, Blanche ! and you are not two hours married ! Do allow Anthony a fair trial !"

"I've been married before, my dear. As to Anthony —" She shrugged her shoulders amusedly. "Good-bye. It is really a relief to get away from all these people. My face is stiff with smiling !"

Margery laughed outright. She kissed her new sister-in-law, and followed her down to the carriage, admiring

the fit of her gown and the undeniable, material beauty of her face and figure. The Professor was fussing over a carriage rug, and Blanche stood in a gleam of sunshine for a minute, a living picture worth looking at by the guests crowding round her. She had chosen a very light shade of grey as her wedding gown, and the picture hat on her unnaturally red hair was the same shade. She was big, luscious, unashamedly redundant of animal life, and the obvious value of her flesh and blood lent a miserly suggestion to her husband's narrow face and hungry eyes. Mrs. Drysdale was one of the nearest to the carriage, and she turned to Beau Livingston in open wonder.

"The more I look at them, the more I marvel!" she said. "I have been in a state of increasing wonder since I first heard of the engagement. From an intellectual point of view, I should have thought them most unsuited."

"Why discuss the intellectual point of view?" said Beau, blandly. "He is marrying her for very fleshly reasons, and the uncomfortable certainty in his brain that it is being overruled by — er — her finger nails, is a consideration for the future."

"But who would have thought he was *that* sort of man!"

"My dear good soul, do not speak as if it were a type! Mankind is universal, not divisional."

"When you use long words, Beau, I always know that it is done to cloak something indecent. I sha'n't dissect you, however, I shall go and talk to True — he leaves a clean taste in my mouth."

They strolled off in different directions as the carriage bowled away in a shower of confetti, and tiny silver horseshoes which Margery and Starling had been manufacturing for weeks past, with Truman's help, out of lead paper. Margery also turned from the gate, and came face to face with Vibart. He had probably been looking at the bride, for the expression she called there

had hardly faded from his eyes. Madge passed him abruptly, with such scant courtesy that she nearly fell into Mrs. Naseby's arms.

"Come round the garden, Mrs. Naseby," she said, taking that lady firmly by the arm. "I want to show you our last roses. They are not all over yet." As they made their way up and down the terraces, she added, "Well, how do you think it has gone off?" with intent to leave her companion no time to think, or realise the abruptness of her former movement.

"Oh, very well, indeed, my dear! A pity that there was n't more sun, was n't it?"

"Yes, the only advantage of the winter is that it gives us a chance to air our furs, and furs are so becoming! Does n't Polly Harbord look well!"

"Very well, indeed. Ah! that reminds me! — *is* it true that she is to marry Dr. Langdon?"

"Good gracious, I don't think so!" said Madge, laughing. "She has n't said a word to me, and I am sure she would have told me."

"Oh, well, I'm glad to hear it, for he has n't a very satisfactory reputation, has he? It was their being about together so much gave rise to the report, I dare say. I must say I think she is rather careless. I heard that they had been met in the train together at eleven o'clock at night, coming out from Cape Town. Rather queer, is n't it?"

"I'm sure it can't be true," said Madge, warmly. "Though they are very old friends. You see he is so often attending Mrs. Wrighton. By the way, Mrs. Naseby, who are these people who are living next door? Polly says she can't think."

"Oh, my dear, he is a retired tradesman from some horrible little place Up Country! One can't possibly know them! They've settled here hoping to get taken up, I suppose, and thinking that no one would know. If he had come from Cape Town, he would n't have

attempted it. And she was a barmaid, and they say she has another husband in Natal! I really don't know who won't settle here next, and pretend to be all right. Who do you think I saw driving the other day?"

"I don't know." Madge was really amused, and was beginning to laugh.

"Why, that disreputable nurse of Mrs. Stratton's whom she had to dismiss two years ago for carrying on with Mr. Livingston. I'm really sorry for Mrs. Stratton. She shipped the woman Home, hoping to get rid of her, for the story was none too creditable. And now she's come back, — married, too, I hear, to a wealthy Jew, — and is going to live hereabouts, I suppose."

Caroline! The memory of the woman's comely self-contained face rose up before Madge's mind with the words, "Mrs. Stratton's nurse." It was Mrs. Naseby, she recollected, who, two years ago at Mrs. Wrighton's first tennis party, gave her the clue to the identity of her companion at Hout's Bay. She knew it was the same. Caroline — here! risen up out of her past into her present, to confront her with a more deadly fear than Vibart's return or the gossip of the neighbourhood. Of all her reasons for dread, evoked by her gradual realisation that her secret might leak out, the possibility of the one witness who could condemn her reappearing on her horizon, had been the least present to Margery's mind. Somehow, the woman once out of Africa, she had taken it for granted that they would never come face to face again, — a groundless supposition, she could see at once, for the world is too small for one human being to escape from another out of all its millions, once there arises a particular reason for such an escape. Yet she had blindly regarded herself as safe at this point, and, behold, her foe had already entered in so far that the keys of the fortress seemed to be hers no longer! Why was Caroline here? Was there a menace in her return? For her own sake the woman would



have surely avoided a neighbourhood where it seemed she had been notorious, even though she had the new protection of her married name. It was with difficulty that Madge detached herself sufficiently from the problem to answer Mrs. Naseby's remarks with any degree of understanding, and she hailed the announcement of that lady's cart and her subsequent departure with relief.

"Does Jack know? Shall I warn him?" she thought suddenly, struck by a new idea. "Perhaps he holds some power over the woman,—he could give me a counter threat of exposure to meet her with, if—if she—attacks me!"

She looked round her anxiously. The guests were thinning, but there were still too many eyes to note it, if she dared to attempt a confidential conversation with Vibart. Beaumont Livingston and Johnnie Dodd were discussing the interminable Political Situation with no suggestion of leave-taking in their half-filled tumblers of whisky and soda. As Madge approached them (she interrupted ruthlessly with a hope that once disturbed they might go), she heard Mr. Johnnie say, "My only fear is that they won't fight. If they arbitrate and come to terms, we shall be in a worse plight than ever."

"Do you want us to fight, Mr. Johnnie?" Madge said, pausing beside him and Livingston. "Now, Beau, don't tell me that your friend shot the tiger in the jungle, because I heard all that preceding speech, so it's no use."

"My dear Madge, you are welcome to the whole of Johnnie's tirade, without interpolation of wild beasts. He is quite harmless! He only wants the whole of Africa ceded to Great Britain, Rhodes as Viceroy, and Johannesburg as the capital. His own incidental advantages would develop themselves. I should take Olive Schreiner for my share!"

"I should be glad to see our fellows get the Franchise," said Mr. Johnnie, good-humouredly. "I've lived in the Transvaal, and — I know. Your husband has given us a free run of the whisky, Mrs. Crofton ; do you approve ?"

"Of course she approves," said Beau, lightly. "Empty bottles are the proof of a bridal success. The more she can persuade us to drink, the better the wedding will have gone off. Here's Vibart trying to say good-bye, without half doing his share ! That's the worse of being a Lieu.-Colonel. It always demoralises men — they are afraid to set a bad example !"

"The only thing worth setting in your philosophy!" retorted Vibart. "Good-bye, Mrs. Crofton. I congratulate you on the way everything has gone off!"

"Which example you are following by going off well on your own account," said Madge, smiling, as she held out her hand. As her fingers touched his a wild impulse seized her to try and tell him — would it be safe to attempt the double conversation which they had so often proved successful? No, Beau was too near, and his wits were too quick ! Unconsciously, however, her hand closed on his with a little spasmodic pressure, in her half-formed intention. He answered the pressure at once, — he never failed to do that, she had known of old, — but without betraying himself even by a look. Margery drew her hand away, dismayed at herself. She had accomplished nothing beyond making him think that she hesitated on the brink of a revival.

Yet the necessity for immediate action remained. At any moment she might have to face disclosure ; perhaps even now Caroline was setting the train of gunpowder alight which was to blow her carefully erected fortress of respectability sky high. She tossed feverishly all night, her brain distraught with plans, and when the morning brought unexpected business for Lanse in Cape Town, she almost hailed it as salvation. At all events she should have the whole day to consider in, if not to

make use of in any more profitable manner, for he would not be home until seven o'clock.

"I am sorry to leave you alone all day," he said, as he set off. "Will you go round and see Starling? Don't mope by yourself, dear."

"Yes, perhaps I will," said Madge, restlessly. "I don't know. Good-bye, Lanse, — sure you won't be home until seven?"

"I'm afraid I can't possibly — I may be later, but I'll try not to keep dinner waiting."

She watched him drive away with a busy brain. The simplest plan would be to send a note to Camp and ask Vibart to come in to tea, — a summons he would be ready enough to answer if no official duty intervened, particularly after her unfortunate hand-clasp yesterday, she thought! But there were several objections. In the first place, she did not want to write to him asking him to come, — a piece of evidence against herself that she had grown too cautious to risk; nor did she want to send the letter to Camp by hand, as she must do, with the certainty of its appearing in the rack for half the Mess to see. In the second place, she was afraid of an interruption; any one might drop in at tea-time, and not only discover Vibart with her, but prevent her speaking to him alone, for she dared not give instructions to her servants that no one else was to be admitted. Thirdly, — this was a mere sentiment, but strong in a feminine mind for that very reason, — she hated the thought of receiving him under her husband's roof, and especially in Lanse's absence. She wondered what Vibart was doing to-day, — if it would be possible to meet him by chance, driving or riding, and speak to him then and there. She had no certainty even that he was in Camp, or was not engaged by some social duty. She had not heard him say the day before, having avoided him as much as possible.

Still cogitating, she wandered out among her flowers,

in the winter sunshine. It was a cold July day, but the sky was clear. Madge walked from terrace to terrace, and was near the boundary of the plumbago hedge, when she heard some one hail her.

It was True. He was standing in the deep red road, some feet below her, by his bicycle, having evidently just dismounted. He was smiling, and his big eyes looked like a dark bar across his face at that distance, for the sun was behind him.

"Good-morning, Lady!" he said. "I met Crofton driving to the Station."

"Yes, I'm all alone. Come in for a minute, True,—no, I'll come to the gate." She ran down the wide moss-grown steps and shook hands. "Lansing is going to be in Cape Town all day," she said. "He can't get back till dinner-time. I feel like a lone, lorn widow!"

"I wish I could come and keep you company, but I'm on duty — I'm going to Camp," True said, — he was in uniform, — "and I sha'n't be free till this afternoon. I suppose that's too late?"

"It is rather. I think I shall go for a ride immediately after lunch. It gets dark so soon now! Anything on to-day in particular?"

"No, only the usual routine. I was up at five this morning, with musketry practice!"

"Poor True, how hard they work you! Where's Mr. Forrester?"

"He's Captain for the week."

"How he must hate it! And — the Colonel?"

True turned his head and looked down the blue-bordered road. "He's going over to luncheon on one of the boats, I think," he said gently. "The *Skate* has a luncheon party."

"Oh! — I thought I heard Polly Harbord say he was going to tea at Mrs. Wrighton's," said Madge, mendaciously.



"Yes, he is, I believe — there, or to the Jacksons'," True agreed.

("That was a fluke!" thought Madge. "How lucky I suggested it.") "He will have to ride hard to get out from Simon's Town after a luncheon party, in time for tea at the Jacksons!" she said carelessly. "He goes there a good deal, does n't he?"

"I believe so."

"Mrs. Jackson is a pretty woman!"

"Yes!"

Madge laughed a little heart-whole laugh of real amusement, and True smiled as if he liked the sound. "He must ride," she remarked idly. "He would take still longer if he came by train."

"He'll be all right if he starts about three," said True. The gravity that was almost like a cloud on his sunny face had disappeared with Madge's tribute to Mrs. Jackson's good looks. It was quite genuine, and he knew it. "Good-bye, Lady! I suppose you can't hear our band practising from here?"

"No, I don't think so. No, of course not — all out at Simon's Town! How can you ask such a silly question?"

"I thought they might be playing the National Anthem," said True, innocently. "I somehow felt as if they were."

"Oh! — no, not the Queen to-day, True!" Madge said laughing, and drawing her hand away. She watched him out of sight rather thoughtfully, and turned to the house with a sigh.

The hours droned on, keeping pace with the indecision of her mind. Should she go and meet him? After all, no one could prove that she had ridden that way with that intent. It was a high road, and free to any one. But should she not? Then she would meet Lanse with a freer conscience, but the danger would be as formidable as ever.

At last — it was after luncheon — she ordered her pony with a kind of desperate impatience, and went up to her own room to put on her habit. It was still fair, and the lengthening sunshine was warm about her as she mounted, and rode out of the stable yard. The black groom touched his forehead, and asked — curiously, she thought — if he should accompany her. “Oh, no, that is not necessary, Henry,” she said carelessly. “Be sure and take the cart down to the Station to meet your master ; you had better start about half-past six — but I shall be back before then.” Did the man look after her with any meaning in his stupid dusky face, or was it her fancy? She rode away from the old grey house in its tangle of vegetation, through the crisp sunshine of the winter afternoon, southwards.

Truman's duties had been somewhat heavy that morning, and he sat down to his luncheon with a sigh of physical satisfaction. The old farmhouse which had been lent to the Mess boasted a long front room beamed and tiled in the true Dutch fashion, and which formed a picturesque background when the Officers blossomed out into red and gold at dinner-time. True looked round him appreciatively, stretched his limbs in his work-a-day khaki, and noticed that so many of his seniors had warned off that he would have to take the head of the table at Mess that night. Then he listened to a little story with which Mowbray was brimming over, concerning a certain fat lady who, during a call at Government House, had cracked a chair with her weight, and the Lady who was receiving, and the Governor, and the Military Secretary, had all rushed pell-mell to the rescue, as if it were a football scramble and the stout lady the ball. It was told without malice, after the broad lines of Mowbray's nature, and True laughed. After lunch he went off to his quarters, congratulating himself that he could get some sleep, for he had been up at five as he had told Madge. He had been resting most beautifully

for about half an hour, when his servant roused him with the information that Major Yeats had asked for him.

True swore softly. "He might have let a poor devil get a little rest!" he said pathetically. "Did you say I was asleep, Stone?"

"Yesser. Major Yeats asked if 'e could come in 'ere, Sir."

"Yes, ask him if he will — it will save my getting up for another minute or so at least," said True, yawning. He glanced round the room apologetically as the Major entered, for he knew that his special failing was extreme disorder among his belongings.

"Awf'ly sorry to receive you like this, Major," he said. "Have a cigar, won't you? Lights on the table."

"All right, True. Don't get up. Have they put you onto musketry practice?"

"Yes, worse luck! Half-past four to turn out every morning. Well, any news?"

"Not particularly. It's rather dull in Town." Yeats was with the Garrison Artillery. "I came over to call on the Admiral, and as I was early I thought I'd look you up."

As the lack of consideration for a fellow-soldier docked of his rightful hours of sleep was unprecedented from his guest, True simply lay and stared at him with all his eyes. Yeats would never have had him roused up in such an inhuman fashion just to pass the time before he went to Admiralty House. True waited, trying to read the lined rugged face, and the shrewd eyes that betrayed nothing, and noted in an idle fashion that Yeats was growing very grey about the temples, and that the eyeglass which was reported to never leave his eye seemed to have drawn a perfect network of wrinkles about it.

"I met Crofton coming out from town," said Yeats, meditatively, as he blew a cloud of smoke.

"Crofton! I thought he was in all day. Mrs. Crofton told me so. I saw her this morning."

"Ah! He told me he finished up business unexpectedly. Glad to get home and not leave his wife alone all day, I suppose." (There was a troubled pause. "And where is — the Colonel?" said Madge's voice in True's brain.) "Crofton's a good sort of fellow, but rather inclined to suspect every man who looks at his wife, I fancy," said Yeats. "I wonder he does n't take her Home for a time. She is rather over-popular here perhaps. I should think a year or so, to shake down, would be good for them both. There would be less chance of some stupid rupture between them then."

("He'll have to ride hard to get out from Simon's Town after a luncheon party, in time for tea at the Jacksons'!" said Madge's voice. "And he must ride. He would take still longer if he came by train.")

"He'll be all right if he starts about three," answered True's in his own memory. He involuntarily glanced at the clock.)

"I saw Mrs. Crofton on the way here," said Yeats, slowly. "I suppose she thought she'd have a ride to pass the time. I wanted to speak to her and tell her her husband would be home first, but she would n't stop. She turned off by a side road, and I lost her."

He turned round and looked at True.

"I should n't wonder if Crofton rode out to meet her — it gets dusk early, and he would be sure to get nervous, as she had no groom," he remarked.

"Yes," said True, vaguely. He got off the bed and began mechanically getting into his riding things.

"I saw your Colonel's horse waiting before the Mess. Is he going towards Wynberg?"

"Yes —"

"He knows all the short cuts and side paths, of course?"



"Yes — Had he started when you came in here? He has been lunching on the *Skate*."

"No, I don't think he had come back."

"I'll see what I can do," said True, simply.

"It would be a pity if there were a misunderstanding which might be avoided," said Yeats, slowly. "I would have followed her, but I could hardly say anything. You know her so much better than I do."

"Yes," said True, again. "Yeats, go and order my pony for me, will you?"

The older man got up with a quickness his lazy attitude had given no hint of, and swung out of the room. Five minutes later True went round to the stables, threw himself into the saddle without a word, and tore out of the yard.

He did not know yet whether or no he was too late. Vibart might have a start of him, for he had not stopped to see. Crofton he knew had. As he leaned forward in the saddle, and the Basuto pony galloped down the road, he was hardly conscious of his own tired limbs, or the surprised stare of the few Kaffirs whom he passed — he was only conscious of the hopelessness of it all. The houses swung past him, and the sudden dark descending made the road dangerous, but he never slackened the pace. It struck him as a strange thing that he was doing, — a thing that could never have taken place at Home, — racing along this queer foreign road, which looked so weirdly unfamiliar in the growing darkness, to do — he knew not what. Even what he was going to say, did he succeed in reaching her first, was a vague uncertainty that troubled his brain; his pony's hoofs beat it out on the smooth road, "What will you say? How can you say anything?"

"After all I may be going on a fool's errand — or if I meet her I may only make her angry," he thought rather miserably. The ride wearied him; there was no pleasure even in the steady swing of the onward pace;

he felt as if the soreness of his heart made his limbs ache also. Kalk Bay — St. James — Mizenburg at last, the road branching off inland from the sea, the last light glimmering on the broad surface of the Vleis as he swerved round them away from the railway, — he rode slower now, looking about him as if he half hoped, half feared to find what he came to seek. Between Diep River and Plumpstead he thought he heard, far along the solitary road behind him, the sound of another horse's hoofs. The rider had not come at a pace equal to his own, but he also was in a hurry, unconscious though he might be. . . . True's eyes peered round him in the darkness; to his right there was nothing but a dark plantation of trees, to the left a small by-path wound into another plantation, and under the dark branches something moved, some yards away. He wheeled short, for he could not afford to waste time, and rode close to it before either of them could see the other.

"Jack!" said a voice out of the darkness. True recognised the terse excitement and uncertainty of the tone, which had the quality of a violin-string strung to breaking pitch.

There was no time to think now what he should say. His own overwrought senses caught the sound of those approaching hoofs. "Mrs. Crofton," he said breathlessly, and without waiting to choose words, "Turn round and go home—quickly! Your husband came out from town an hour ago—he may come to meet you."

"True!" The startled voice had a new note of dismay. "What do you—mean?" Madge said, and he felt that she gathered up her reins to take to flight.

"Don't ask me—don't stay and talk—go! Ride hard!" he commanded tersely. "The Tracker is just behind us—he had better not see you—he might guess what you came for. Ride on straight—I'll turn and stop him, and keep him talking for a few minutes to give you a start."

She had ridden out of the shelter of the trees before he finished speaking, and for a moment he caught a glimpse of her stricken white face. Then he heard her horse begin to trot, — change from a trot to a canter — faster — faster still — and the galloping hoofs died into distance. True turned his panting, dripping pony and rode back along the road by which he came.

The rapid twilight darkens all the land about five in July. Out of the darkness, into the electric light of his own road, came a blurred figure — a double figure, human and animal, and Crofton pulled up his horse and exclaimed with relief.

“Madge! I was just setting out to meet you. My dear child, you should n’t ride alone so late! They told me you had gone towards Plumpstead.”

“It is barely five, Lanse, only it gets dark so early now. But I’m sorry I was out when you came in; I thought I had plenty of time for a ride, and there was nothing else to do. How was it you got out so early?”

“Oh, I could n’t see one man, and soon squared another. Your voice sounds tired, Sweetheart. I hope you did n’t overdo it!”

“Oh, no — it was a lovely day for a ride — I only want my tea.”

She almost dreaded going into the lighted hall, and surreptitiously rubbed her cheeks while he dismounted. But though she might get the colour back she could not drive the stricken look from her eyes or the hopeless droop from her lips. As she stood by the tea-table eating her tea, and trying to talk as usual, she was struggling with the consciousness of a great shame. True knew! — he guessed, — something. Though he could not know the reason of her wish to meet Vibart, and probably misjudged her in that particular, he knew, and she could not deny, the damning fact that she did want to meet him — that she had calculated on her hus-

band's absence, and ridden out to waylay him. And True had come to warn her, having heard — she wondered how — that Lanse was coming home and might ride to meet her and discover her with Vibart.

"Did you meet any one you knew, Lanse?" she said, with a puzzled feeling that she must discover how he had encountered True.

"I met Yeats in the train — he went on to Simon's Town. Then I stopped at the Drysdals on the way up, and then I came home to find you riding in the darkness unprotected! That's what comes of leaving one's wife for the day!" He laughed and put his arm round her, pleased to be back early and to have found her safe at hand after all. "You must n't go out without Henry another time, Madge. I don't like these roads for women after dark, even on horseback."

Major Yeats also! — so the thought wound in and out of Margery's brain, even while she smiled apologetically and said she would do as he wished. Did every one — the whole world — know? Mowbray's warnings and the shock she had received from them were as nothing to this. The unvarnished horror of True's words came back to her and struck her like a blow. He had had no time to soften them, and she felt in her humiliation that she had proved their truth by accepting them in the stress of the moment without a protest. "The Tracker is just behind us — he had better not see you — he might guess what you came for!" But how could she protest? What was there to protest against — save that he told her the bare, ugly truth? In the bitterness of her heart she realised that the thing that she had thrust into the background — the irradicable thing that she had thought she could put on one side, and be happy in spite of it, — cropped up everywhere to mark and shame her. It was spoiling all her married life, even though she succeeded in hiding it from her husband. It was lowering her in her friends' opinion —



for what could True really think of her? — it was Nemesis, perpetually stalking at her side and darkening the sunshine, and spreading nets for her feet, until she grew tired of struggling against it. Throughout the evening her thoughts kept wilfully straying to Simon's Town, and to True, and trying vainly to reconstruct his attitude with regard to her. How long had he suspected? To-day — yesterday — a month ago? Had Major Yeats been the one to suggest it to him? How far had the story spread? It was perhaps merciful that she could not know.

Truman took the head of the table that night, as he had foreseen earlier in the day. Facing him down the long vista of regimental plate, and between the red-shaded candles, he could catch a glimpse of Ransom's pink-and-white face and little yellow moustache, for the Drawler was Vice, and away on each side stretched scarlet jacket against scarlet jacket with the silver Greyhound of the Duke's flashing from the dark-blue facings. The careless bronzed faces became flushed and heated as the wine went round, and the conversation increased in colour and allusion, for none of the older men were present to act as a restraint. Suddenly a few words sprang out of the general hum and struck on Truman's ears. They were spoken in a lowered tone to a next-door neighbour, but not quite so carefully as if the speaker had been on his guard. Truman paused deliberately before helping himself to the last course, in order to be sure, and then turned to identify the speaker, though his quick ears had distinguished the voice. It was Forrester, and what he had said was, "The Cunningham girl who fooled her husband."

The man to whom the words had been directed was Scott Murray, the Adjutant. Both he and Forrester had been frequent visitors at Vine Lodge and the Rosary, and Truman knew that they would neither of them hesitate an instant to accept any hospitality offered

to them by the Croftons. There was a somewhat raised discussion over the last gymkana going on among the other Officers which hummed safely above Forrester's words, but Truman waited with sharpened ears for the reply.

"The Tracker is stalking again, but it's an old prey. She is a damned little fool!"

"He was going in that direction to-day. He's got a new dodge and pretends that it's the Jackson woman — but she would n't look at him! He really went to the Rosary of course. I suppose the hubby was safely packed off to town, first thing this morning —"

"The Tracker generally hunts by night rather than by day!"

Truman had finished the course, and leaned back in his chair. There was a little swing of his shoulders as he settled himself into his uniform. In that moment Henderson, on the other side of Forrester, caught the drift of the conversation, and joined in.

"She was at Kenilworth on Saturday," he said with the desire of a very young man to appear as knowing in the vices of this world as his seniors. "And the Tracker was trying to hang round their cart with that loathly leer of his. Crofton seems to be as blind as a bat — unless it's intentional."

"A happy house-party, perhaps —"

Murray broke off short. He had spoken with a laugh, and without the guard of Forrester's lowered tones, and his Captain was resting one hand on the table and leaning forward, so that their eyes met.

"Mr. Murray," said Truman, with the quick distinct utterance which went down the whole table. "May I remind you that it is not etiquette to mention ladies at Mess."

The words carried. Men at the further end ceased their conversation and looked up, conscious that something was going on. The long mess-table was for the

moment as immovable as a picture, — the Subalterns turning in their chairs with puzzled or eager faces to look at the two principal figures, — Murray, wine-flushed and with the courage of his dinner in him, glaring at his senior. But there was a look on Truman's face which made the Adjutant's insolence waver. He was a fat young man with protruding eyes, and his skin went a dull crimson as he faced Truman's steady gaze.

"I beg your pardon, Captain Truman," he said stiffly, and turning to Forrester he launched into less dangerous subjects. True's eyes left the two as though he had never seen them, and rested absently on a piece of plate in front of him. It represented two wild beasts under a palm-tree tearing each other savagely, and, like all pieces of presentation plate in messes, it was of no earthly use, and too cumbersome to be ornamental. But the beasts were finely moulded, and the cruelty of slaughter was rather cleverly conveyed in their attitudes; the lion was down, turning helplessly to snap and snarl at the victorious tiger, who was tearing him. Something in the beast's evil, savage face put Truman in mind of his Colonel. The hideous likeness seemed to start out of the mess-plate as he looked at it, and he stared at the silver tiger in troubled fascination. It was a fanciful notion, but did not Jack Vibart tear his prey in something the same fashion? Was there no beast of prey lurking in that handsome human exterior? Truman, though he did not speak of it openly as some of his brother Officers, had no less knowledge of the Tracker's rapacity.

"If she could only be stopped in time," thought the little fellow rapidly — his mind worked in the quick deft fashion of his speech. "If I could only warn her! — there does n't seem to be any one else to do it — and I hardly know how to, without making her angry with me. Not that I should mind that so much, if it did any good."

He rose mechanically, for the band had risen too and were singing in mighty harmony "God save the Queen!" This was a custom in the Duke's, many of whose bandsmen had trained voices, and preferred to sing the national anthem after Mess, instead of playing it. The music reminded True of the foolish friendly little joke between him and Madge, and he almost groaned as he remembered the incident of that morning, and her mischievous, innocent eyes as she drew her hand away without letting him kiss it, subject-wise. "Not the Queen to-day, True," she said. He wondered if she would ever look at him again quite so, after his breathless warning of the afternoon, and the terrible plain speaking to which he had been driven. Truman had come very close to heartache over Margery's sunny personality, and the pussy-cat ways which had attracted not only Vibart, but Beau Livingston and Barton and a host of others. He kept his wounds to himself, and Madge suspected the possibility of True being "real," as far as she was concerned, as little as she would have suspected the men who professed to be her friends bandying her name about at Mess. But True was very fond of Madge Crofton, as he had been of Madge Cunningham, and though his friendship for her was simply honest liking since her marriage, he still kept an especially warm corner of his heart for her — his "Lady," of whom these men about him had spoken as "A damned little fool!"

"God save the Queen!" rang the voices of the band.

"Amen!" said the Captain, loyally, with a double application of the words, and walked off to his quarters, neglecting his usual resort of the billiard table, which the same good Samaritan who owned the old farmhouse had lent to the Duke's, and round which the younger men had speedily congregated.

"What's up with True? He's awfully sick to-night,"



Tennyson said as he chalked his cue. "Your play, Silence."

Wright cannoned without answering, and the Drawler, who was marking, took it upon him to reply.

"True is coming out as a knight-errant of distressed damsels — who are no better than they should be. Beauty was always irresistible to him."

"True's a deuced good sort," said Silence, shortly. He was one of the senior Subs, and when he did open his lips he did not fear to speak, even to a Captain. "A good many of our seats might be vacant in the Mess without any one caring much about it — but True would make a big gap."

"The President is popular! — but no one wants to depreciate True. What was up between him and Murray to-night? I could n't hear at my end of the table, but Mowbray says there was a row, and told me something of the cause."

"It was Forrester's fault. He was talking in his own sweet little style about a woman, — a mutual acquaintance, but we need n't mention names, — and Murray added some of his own delicate opinions. True got rusty for once, and stopped it."

"True will lose his popularity if he interferes with the conversation like that — it's almost unheard of," said Wright. He knew many things in his quiet way. "The Mess takes its tone from the Colonel. Unless the Tracker goes, reformation is hopeless."

"And Forrester in particular is such an everlasting copy of Vibart. I don't believe Hard Lines was the most to blame to-night."

"I wish the Tracker would go," said Tennyson, honestly. "His escapades are a disgrace to the Mess. How any decent woman can have him to her house, if she knows him — but then she does n't."

"She would hardly be decent if she did," remarked Wright, dryly. "You to play, Bard. What a duffing

stroke ! — we want True here to preach cannons to you — wonder why he does n't turn up to-night ? ”

The Captain of B Company was at that moment sitting in his own room, among a pile of cushions, in extreme dejection. Six dogs had come to share his solitude, — with one exception, his own property, — and had grouped themselves in picturesque attitudes about him and his arm-chair, their wet noses affectionately rubbing portions of his person at intervals. But True was not to be distracted from his gloom even when Wags, the Irish terrier, did his best to tarnish the gold lace on his master's mess-jacket, and Miss Anderson played a devil's tattoo on the smooth cloth of his knee with the sharpest foot-claws that a colley bitch ever possessed. True ordered them off absently, and continued his mental inspection of the moral atmosphere of Wynberg. It was not encouraging. He foresaw Mrs. Naseby and her associates pulling Madge's reputation to pieces at the next tennis, if the story grew as it had done since Vibart's return, and Beau Livingston telling witty stories at the Club and the Vineyard. He dropped his head in his hands and sat thinking — thinking — how Madge might best be spared. The efficiency of his beloved Company had never received deeper thought from him, but he found no solution of the problem, which was likely to grow more complicated as time went on, unless by a happy chance the Croftons went Home. The story might be forgotten then, and the Regiment moved on to Natal. It was a floating population, and by the time Madge came back to the neighbourhood, if she ever did, there might not be a tongue left to wag over her name. But as long as she remained in Wynberg, the danger of the scandal grew and grew. There was nothing to hope from Vibart — the whole affair was miserable. His head went a shade lower, and the dogs drew closer together and became concerned. True's attitude suggested trouble, and trouble for True meant

a combination among the dogs against some person or persons unknown.

"What's up?" said the Retriever, in amazement. "Is it Orderly Room or mess-badgering? He's President again, but, Lord! it can't be that for True."

"Colonel or Subs, I'm willing to take an inch out of their ankles for it!" snapped Miss Anderson, the Colley.

"It's not the Curronel — it's a woman!" suggested the Irish dog, with a wink.

"Well, I tell you this," said the wire-haired Mongrel, "if Starling has been playing the fool with him, I'll snap at her the very next biscuit she offers me. She's a nice girl, but if she don't appreciate True, she must be learned. That's all."

"She gave me a chocolate cream the last time I was at Friedenhof," said the Fox-terrier, who belonged to Forrester. "It seems a pity — but a small nip soon heals, and she'll thank us some day, poor girl! It's an unlooked-for lack of taste on her part, though. My master says —"

"Don't you talk to me about your master," said the Retriever, with a growl. "He kicked me on the sly the other day. If True had n't called me to heel just then, I'd have seen Mr. Forrester all round the Camp!"

The sixth dog was called by courtesy a rough-coated Japanese. He did not speak, but he walked up to True and squatted on his knee before his owner could eject him, which had the effect of rousing the presumably rejected suitor at last.

"Confound the dogs! — they're all over me. I shall get rid of the whole lot," he said, a threat which did not disturb any of his canine friends who knew its worth. "There's nothing to be done. Poor little Madge!"

Her photo smiled at him from the looking-glass where he had tucked it into the wood frame, and he smiled back with a gravity in his eyes which Madge would

hardly have recognised. He was very tired, both with his early duties and the long day, his afternoon ride and his own thoughts. With a despondency and weariness very unlike him, he undressed and went to bed, most of the dogs disposing themselves on his feet or about the room. Some reflection of his mood must have reached the sensitive minds of his companions, for the last thing he heard was a deep sigh from Miss Anderson, as human as his own might be, and the little snuffling breath which sounded like a child sobbing and which the rough-haired Mongrel always gave when his world went askew.



## CHAPTER XIX

*"Yea, beside the east-gate of Eden,  
(Eden's bower's in flower!)  
Where God joined them and none might sever,  
The sword turns this way and that for ever."*

JULY glided into August, and still things waited. People in England went away to the moors or the sea-side or the country, as usual, and when conversation dragged over the dinner-table, or there was really no local interest, they said, "Do you think we shall have War in South Africa?—they say the Ministers have urged it, and the Queen won't sign!" And then some one else said, "I hope not, I'm sure. The Mining shares would go down!" And that was all. Downing Street was silent, and the Press yawned over the Dreyfus case still.

But in the Colony, the cord was strained almost to breaking, and the life out there had the nervous tension of a fractious woman who has to partake of a man's danger without being told the why or wherefore. England represented the man, and like a man kept its own counsel. Africa was the woman who must look to her lord and master for succour, and, truth to tell, doubts but that he bestirs himself too slowly.

"The tone out here is most unhealthy just now," Beau Livingston said discontentedly—he was calling on the Strattons, at Rondesbosch. "I left England because of their disgusting habit of falling into east winds in the spring, and I am not out six months before the whole social system is disturbed by the smell of War."

"But shall we have it, Mr. Livingston?" said his

hostess, doubtfully. "England is so reluctant to fight, if she can settle things by talking nonsense. They always talk nonsense at Home, it seems to me, when they want to give another Power time to think better of it."

"Of course it will come," said Beau, quietly. "As soon as the Boers are ready. I don't think they are as yet. Or else Steyn is trying to drive a better bargain with Kruger than any Briton ever succeeded in doing. Set a Boer to match a Boer! But can't you see the War yet? I can — it is nearly in the middle distance now. And it disturbs and annoys my pastoral existence among the plumbago. All the Army men are being recalled or refused leave, out here, — True is hardly to be consoled. He has not seen his mother for four years, and he does not believe that he will get much chance of active service."

"True adores his mother. It is just the sort of thing one might expect from him, is n't it? Why does n't he think much of his chance?"

"They have all got an idea that they will be drafted off to guard the Border, and that any fun there may be will be further off — in the Free State, I suppose. I differ from them, but time will show. Anyhow we are all more or less discontented, and Margery Crofton is ill, and I find life uncomfortable."

"Is Mrs. Crofton ill? Poor little woman! I like her very much, though I have never seen much of her. What is the matter? I must go and call."

"Do. She likes visitors — I was there yesterday, and I have no doubt I shall find myself there to-morrow. I don't know what the matter is, except that Crofton insisted on her seeing a doctor, after the fussy habits of husbands, and the doctor, after the manner of doctors, said that she must have absolute rest. So she is on the sofa. I must say she does it very well, and she looks very nice on the sofa. Still, I would rather see her running about as usual."

Mrs. Stratton was not a very young woman, and she had a certain kindness of heart under a cold exterior. She had been transplanted to Africa too late to become affected with the atmosphere. As Mrs. Drysdale said, Women influenced the Colony, but the Colony influenced Girls. Mrs. Stratton was one of the Women who influenced the Colony. She had remained serenely English and unassailable during the three or four years she had lived in the Suburbs, and the people whom she did not care to cultivate always called her a prig.

"Don't talk nonsense, Mr. Livingston!" she said smiling. "But tell me all about it. Mrs. Crofton is not a *malade imaginaire*, is she?"

"The powers preserve us, no! The sofa frets her as much as it becomes her. But I admit that her looks suggest its advisableness. She has taken to a fragile appearance which is inducing Crofton to go Home sooner than he intended. If you can imagine a flower which is temporarily invalided, and which the fairies have put to bed on a moss-bank, you have got Mrs. Crofton on her sofa."

"You are quite hopeless. But I will go and see for myself."

Which she did the very next day, and drove over to Wynberg in the afternoon. She found Madge alone, as it chanced, Lanse having taken a flying visit to Constantia at her own request; the invalid was lying on a sofa, as Beau had said, and her appearance was something of a shock to Mrs. Stratton.

"Please don't get up, Mrs. Crofton!" she said, as Margery hastily rose. "I heard through Mr. Livingston that you had been ailing, and came over just to see how you were. But if you will treat it as a formal call, I shall feel obliged to go!"

"Well, if you would rather I received you after the manner of a Sultana," said Margery, laughing, as she settled herself again on her couch. "I am so sorry my

husband is out. He has been quite domestic lately, helping me to entertain, and making up for my deficiencies. But I sent him off to-day to look after his hobby, the wine farm. It is so dreadful for a man to be always tied to his wife's sofa, isn't it?"

"I think it depends a good deal on the wife, and whether she pets her own ailments or is really unwell. Mr. Crofton ought to take you Home. I expect the climate is proving too much for you."

"I think it is rather. I have been out two years, and they say the first two always serve you so. It seems rather ridiculous doesn't it, when we get such perfect weather, and it really is not such a very hot corner of the world. I suppose it is the change from our English inclemency. When we come out again I expect to stay quite a long time without feeling it."

"I went Home after the first twelve months — but that was home-sickness!" said Mrs. Stratton, laughing. "Mrs. Naseby never goes now, she tells me. At least not once in ten years. She has no ties in England, and the climate suits her."

"Oh, by the way," — Margery hurled herself with characteristic decision into the opening given her, but she clenched her little hot hands and her throat went dry, — "Mrs. Naseby was telling me that you had had a most unpleasant experience with a servant of yours whom you dismissed or sent Home or something." She gathered breath and went on. "Is it true that she has married and come out again? Lanse was saying the other day that he should like to have white servants, and we could bring them out from England. But really it seems to me they generally turn out less satisfactory than the black."

"I had an English nurse when I first came out," said Mrs. Stratton, quietly. "I am sorry to say she got into trouble here. There was a great deal of unpleasant talk, and though I do not know that the woman was entirely



to blame, I dismissed her because I could not have that sort of a person in my household. We sent her Home about two years ago."

"And she has come out again, married?"

"Certainly not. She could not have done so, for she had caught fever while she was in Cape Town after she left me, and died on the homeward voyage."

"Are you *sure*?" The intense eagerness of Madge's whole nature thrust even her prudence on one side. She must know for certain, and she questioned Mrs. Stratton determinedly.

"Quite certain. A friend of mine was going Home on the same boat, and wrote to me about it. I am sorry to say the woman was not behaving very well on board, but her death was terribly sudden, poor thing! She was only ill a few days."

"Mrs. Naseby was so sure she had met her! She told me she had married a rich Jew."

"Mrs. Naseby is rather apt to be mistaken, when she is most certain," said Mrs. Stratton, dryly. "I think I know the people she means. I have seen the woman driving. At first sight, she is rather like my nurse, Caroline,—I could see it myself; but the face is quite different to any one who knew her."

Margery's whole body quivered with a sigh of relief. Her intangible illness, which was mainly nerve-prostration due to the strain of the last months, and the endless worry she had undergone, had ruined her old self-control and evenly balanced temperament. She found it all she could do to keep up appearances before Mrs. Stratton, after the sudden relief of that lady's announcement of Caroline's death, and to talk of other topics as usual. As her visitor rose to go, she paused by the sofa and looked down at Madge.

"I really think you ought to go Home, Mrs. Crofton," she said. "I shall tell your husband so when I next see him. The Colony is so disturbed too that it is

likely to be a most undesirable place of residence in the near future."

"Mr. Livingston thinks we shall have War," remarked Margery. She was wishing that Mrs. Stratton would go, and fearing every moment that she would break down.

"Yes, and indeed it looks like it. I suppose you have heard about the Duke's?"

"No, except that they had a scare last week. All the mess-plate was packed up, and they thought they were really going."

"They *are* really going. They are off on Wednesday. To Mafeking or Matjesfontein, they don't know which. My husband met Major Reynolds this morning, and heard it from him."

Margery sank back on her pillows turning very white. The sudden evaporation of all her dangers together was as great a shock to her jarred nerves as the exposure she had dreaded would have been. Perhaps it shook her more potently still, at the moment, for had she had to face the worst, she would have braced herself to do it, whereas the knowledge that by Vibart's departure, and the ceasing of gossip among the men of the Duke's, her own safety was secured, relaxed her strained senses so that for a minute she thought she was going to faint. She found herself saying mechanically, "I never knew Major Reynolds well. He has only come out lately," as she shook hands with Mrs. Stratton. Then with a plucky effort she pulled herself together. "I shall be awfully sorry if they lose any of the men I know," she said as naturally as she could. "How dreadful it will be saying good-bye to them all! I wonder True did not come and tell me."

"I expect he has hardly had time. There will be a lot of leave-taking in the next week or so. The Rutlandshire will probably follow them shortly."

"And we shall be left quite unprotected! Are you

nervous, Mrs. Stratton? Good-bye! Thanks so much for coming to see me. It is dull work lying here."

Mrs. Stratton went home with a thoughtful face. "How white she went when I told her!" she said. "And it is Colonel Vibart's Regiment! Can there be any truth in that story? More than ever now I think Mr. Crofton ought to take his wife Home."

When Lansing came in, about twenty minutes later, he was surprised to find no light in the room where he had left Margery. She had evidently not rung for the servants to bring lamps, and he threw off his overcoat and went into the room hastily to see to the omission for her.

"Why, Madge, why have n't you lighted up?" he began, stumbling against a low chair. There was only the fire to struggle with the darkness, and that had sunk so low that at first he did not see the outline of Margery's prostrate figure on the sofa. But he stopped short as if struck. She was lying with her face buried in the cushions, crying as if her heart were breaking, and with the abandonment of a child. He went over and dropped on his knees by her side.

"Margery, what is it? Madge, my darling, do you feel so ill?"

She laid her head on his shoulder as he raised her, but for a time she was quite unable to stop the wild tempest of tears which had overtaken her. He could have no idea that the fit of crying which so frightened him was the long pent-up terror of the past twelve months finding relief at last. Nor could she explain. After a time she stopped crying and simply lay in his arms as weak as if she had had a long illness, while he held her tenderly, trying to disguise his anxiety.

"Madge," he said at last gently, "what *was* it, dear? Do you feel so ill?"

"Oh, no — it was nothing," she whispered. "I think it did me good. I have been feeling like a breakdown for some days. I'm sorry, Lanse, — don't worry."

"I'm not worrying, only I can't bear to see you so. Would you like Blanche — Mrs. Cunningham — to come over and stay for a day or so? I'm sure she would."

"Oh, no!" She smiled a little, and put her hand up to his face with a little caress. "I am quite content with you! I am only — only rather run down."

"I shall get you a glass of wine," Lanse said decidedly, laying her back carefully on the pillows. He found a relief in the practical suggestion, and it seemed to dispel the discomfort of his wife's intangible ailment. "I don't believe that doctor prescribes for you properly — what you want is port wine and feeding up."

"All right — you take the case in hand. I should like the wine," Madge said languidly, and while he went to fetch it, she pulled herself together and wiped her eyes and smoothed her ruffled hair. When Lanse returned she was already better, and her colour returned a little after the stimulant. Lanse sat on the edge of the sofa while she drank it, gazing at her in his unwavering fashion with his curious coloured eyes.

"I say, Madge," he said. "I shall have to take you Home if you go on like this."

"I don't mean to go on like this, though. Here's my own health!" She laughed faintly, and swallowed the wine.

"Well, but would you like to go — sooner than I meant?"

"Yes, I should like it," said Madge, slowly; but her tone was not so heartfelt as it would have been earlier in the day before the causes of her fear were removed. "But you really need n't hurry on my account, Lanse. I shall be all right. If it were n't for this War business, I could go Up Country and be braced up."

He shook his head. "There will be no going Up Country for holiday trips at present," he said. "It's going to be a big thing, Madge, — only don't repeat what I tell you. It won't do any good, and it might do



harm. The whole of South Africa will be like a volcano in a very short time."

"Then you must n't go Home," said Madge, decidedly. "You 'll want to stay and look after things, won't you?"

"I should like to stay and have a brush at them with the irregulars!" She gave a slight cry, and sat up quivering.

"Oh, Lanse! you would n't — would you?"

"No, I shall take you Home. You are not fit to be left — at present," he added inwardly, but the reservation of his tone passed her by. He was making a greater self-sacrifice than she could understand, even if she had realised how keen a temptation it would be to him to volunteer. Lanse had thrown himself, with characteristic intensity, into the question of the Outlander's rights, and had identified himself with the interests of his adopted country so that the coming struggle was of vital importance to him. He felt his own going Home almost as a desertion, and had gone through a mental struggle before he decided that he was responsible for his wife before more public claims upon him, and that though it touched his honour to turn his back without striking a blow for British interests, he must take Madge back to England first, and then — if she were stronger — well, he might get a chance after all! Once he had made up his mind to a thing, he did not discourse on it, not only because he was a secretive animal by nature, but because to decide meant with him to do, and discussion was superfluous. Therefore Madge, naturally enough, did not gauge the reluctance beneath his suggestion when he said, "I can get things into shape, and leave by October or November. How would that suit you?"

"Perfectly," she returned. "Only I shall hate leaving the house so soon after we've got it just to our liking!"

"We'll let it furnished. I sha'n't sell, after the usual

fashion. We can come back again — when things are more settled,” he said grimly, with a close shutting of his lips.

“And it may not come to anything,” said Madge, hopefully. “Major Yeats was talking about our making an armed demonstration the other day. Perhaps that will bring them to reason, — Lanse, when you shut your lips like that you might be Fate, or the Sphinx, or something equally wise and implacable ! You evidently don’t agree with my optimistic views. What a good chin you have, by the way !”

He smiled, being perfectly aware of his own good points. As he sat facing her on the edge of her couch, Madge looked at him with some pride. The greens and greys of his eyes, which were even hazel in some lights, the invincible line of brow and jaw, — even the little trick of thrusting out his chin, and a way he had of closing his fingers firmly on anything he touched, struck her as distinguished peculiarities contrasted with other men’s more uniform good looks. “Lanse could never be lost in a crowd,” she thought, and then with the old fear, “How much I have grown to care for him ! Supposing I had lost him ! — for sometimes I hold my breath with the fear that he would never forgive me. He is not very merciful, and if he had found out — But I won’t think of that now, for I needn’t.”

The strain of many months was not to be recovered from in as many hours, but Madge was healthy, and possessed of wonderful recuperative power, once her mind was at ease, and she really looked much better in a day or so. Lanse said it was his prescriptions, and took much credit to himself for his doctoring and the wine and beef tea which Madge meekly swallowed by his orders.

The trial of the next few days was the series of farewell visits from the Duke’s which poured in upon her, and which she had serious thoughts of inviting Blanche

to come and share, for she did not relish the idea of tête-à-tête partings with some of her friends. More especially had she a dread of meeting True, and of his speaking plainly again in the stress of a last interview. Since that day of his race from Simon's Town to warn her and send her home, she had contrived never to see him alone. She felt, in the shrinking of her overwrought nerves, that she could not. It had been as True had feared, for she had never since that day been the same to him, though her manner showed no outward alteration in other people's presence. But he knew it, and he knew also that nothing harder than this could be asked of him in his struggle to help her. Lanse was with her, as it happened, when Truman came to say good-bye ; it was a difficult visit, and for once his cheery talk and smile failed him. He stood silent, at the very last, with his big eyes so dark and strained that Madge felt an agonized dread of looking at him, for fear they should be wet.

"Good-bye, True," she said, as he was leaving. "I hope you will come back quite safe, and win the Cross ! Don't quite forget me."

Her voice softened, as if she asked his pardon. The hand that held hers tightened—it was the only assurance he could give of his loyalty.

"Good-bye, Lady," he said. "I hope you will soon get quite strong and well again !"

Then he went. Lanse accompanied him to the door, and shook hands heartily, for he had liked True with the instinct of one honest man for another. "Good luck, old fellow !" he said. "Sure you won't have a peg before you go ?" Lanse's demonstrations of good fellowship were invariably material, and very masculine.

"No thanks. I've got other calls to make !"

"True's as decent a fellow as I ever met," Lanse remarked, as he re-entered the drawing-room. "I'm awfully sorry he's going. Soldier's fortune though, of

course, and the best thing for him," he added almost enviously.

"Yes," said Madge, with a little gasp. "I hope I sha'n't have to say good-bye to many men I like, knowing that they may be killed! I shall certainly ask Blanche to come over and support me until they are gone!"

Blanche was perfectly willing to come on application, and drove over regularly for the next three afternoons before the Duke's departure, without asking leave of her husband or taking the least notice of his unsweetened remarks. He liked some one at hand to pour out his tea for him, — which, as his wife explained, he could perfectly well do for himself upon occasion. Blanche was the right woman to cope with an inherent bully, and the Professor was very much married, as he found to his own impotent disgust. The shouting policy proved ineffective, save that it certainly drove his wife out of the room and left him to swear at space. Blanche had gauged Anthony Cunningham, and she knew where her power lay. When he grumbled or stormed, she used to lie back in an easy-chair and cross her knees with an inimitable flutter of frills, and a display of coloured ankles more expressive than any words. Every inch of lace beneath her skirts devoted the Professor to the devil, and her shapely movements suggested threats he had learned to understand. She did not care two straws for his ravings; but he had come to care very much that his bullying career had ended in a woman having the whip hand of him. Blanche was avenging her sex, both black and white.

"How's Anthony?" Madge said when her sister-in-law first appeared in answer to her invitation. "I was afraid he might prevent your coming." She spoke with intentional malice, to enjoy the answer. Blanche's bear-taming never lost its charm for her on account of old scores.



"Were you?" said Mrs. Cunningham, raising her eyebrows. "He was n't."

"Did he say anything?" asked Madge. Mrs. Cunningham's reports of former conversations had had a rich flavour for all their terseness.

"Well, no, I did n't mention the subject, so he has not as yet said anything. When he does it will be time enough to think of an — explanation!"

Margery chuckled. Whether or no the Professor protested, Blanche drove over each day and stayed until dinner-time, returning to Vine Lodge for that meal, spiced with a renewal of hostilities from the Professor. It disturbed her not at all; in fact she had no objection to such spicing, for it relieved the tameness of the tête-à-tête, and gave her a display of power, and practice in keeping the upper hand. With her assistance, Madge got over farewell visits from Forrester and Ransom, Henderson, Wright, Tennyson, and a score of others. The two whose final appearance had stood out in her imagination beforehand — V. C. and Mowbray — did not appear until the last day before the Regiment's departure. Then the one over-lapped the other, and as Mowbray was still present when Cayley appeared, Margery saw that she was caught in a trap. Blanche could only talk to one, and the other would be free to say more than the conventional adieu to her, if he chose. The other happened to be Mowbray, and he did choose. He came straight to his object, after the manner of a boy, and crossing the room sat down by Margery's side the instant that Blanche began to talk to Cayley.

"Madge," he said, and the tone was dangerously full of feeling, "I want to ask a favour of you."

"Well, Miles?"

"Will you give me a photograph? I know it's infernal cheek, but — but there's always the chance that I may n't see you again, you know."

"Don't!" she said with a sudden sharp pain in her

voice. It was not so much for him, individually, as for the momentary realisation of the grim reality of this leave-taking. It seemed almost impossible that these commonplace, ordinary young men who had been making hurried calls on her during the last few days, during which they sat and talked as usual, — if with a trifle more forced lightness, — among the pretty everyday surroundings of her home, could be transformed into possible heroes, with more than a probability of death but a few short months away from them. Once more the sunlight mocked the serious side of life, as it danced among the flowers and about the pretty, dainty room where she had so often entertained them. . . .

Mowbray looked at her in silence for a minute, all his boyish soul in his young blue eyes. Neither curly hair or colourless skin, nor a certain comic appearance which had gained him a soubriquet of "Toby" in the Duke's, could do away with the dignity of his very real feeling. Because he was in earnest, he was a man with a man's value.

"I wanted to see you alone," he said. "I had so much to say! I never expected to find your sister-in-law here."

"I think it was better not," she said gently.

He did not answer, but went on looking at her in the same concentrated way, as if he could not look his full, until he left. Margery glanced helplessly at Blanche. She did not like to go and let him out herself, for fear he should break down; but there was a troubled, pitiful look in her eyes as she gave him her hand. He gripped it until the rings cut into the flesh, quite unconscious of the nervous strength of his own clasp.

"Good-bye — God bless you!" he said huskily under his breath.

"Good-bye, Miles," she returned, her own voice a little unsteady. "I will send you the photo."

Mrs. Cunningham good-naturedly came to the rescue.

Instead of ringing the bell for the servant, she went to the front door with him herself. "He was awfully upset," she said to Madge afterwards. "And we did n't want that black girl staring her eyes out at him. I waited some minutes while he recovered himself."

"He is so young!" Madge said pitifully.

"I know. He's very much in love with you and very miserable. A big fight will be the best thing possible for him. I told him so, while we stood at the front door, and I pretended that I had n't seen his eyes."

Margery had cause to know that Blanche was some minutes gone from the room. As soon as the door had closed behind them, Cayley came over and stood by the mantelpiece, with his arm resting on it, looking down at her.

"It is so dreadful!" she said involuntarily. "I can't bear to think of you all going away!"

"Can't you? It's the best thing that could happen to some of us," he said wearily.

"Are you glad to go?"

"Very."

She thought of his untidy, degraded home life, and her eyes were wetter than they had been for Mowbray.

"I never realised until to-day that you might be killed," she said with a little shudder.

"So much the better," he said in his most cynical voice. He was pulling at the brown moustache which hid the lines round his mouth with strong, restless fingers. It was a little trick she knew well.

"I suppose I can't do anything for you?" she said vaguely, with an impulse of indefinite pain.

"I can't think of anything you could do," he returned in a curious tone. She looked up, and their eyes met. Margery sprang to her feet suddenly, as if the tension of the moment were too great.

"Oh, please don't!" she said, almost crying. "Please don't!"

"Do you know what I am regretting?" he said fiercely. "It is that we have n't been anything to each other. You have n't wanted me. You have left me out in the cold. Oh, I know you never cared much for me — but you might at least have pretended that you did. You have done so for scores of others."

"I thought you were too good to flirt with! — I always liked talking to you," she said with a directness which surprised herself.

"Did you?" he said. "But I never knew it."

"I can't help that. I showed you as plainly as I could."

"I am ungrateful," he said. "You have always been very good to me."

Blanche's footstep came back along the hall.

"I liked you," said Madge, simply.

"Yes," he said, with his tired little laugh. "That was just it — and explains it nicely. You — liked me!"

The old feeling that she had missed this man among other and more harmful interests in her life, came back upon her with a sense of loss. They might at least have been friends. It almost seemed as if they might have helped each other.

"The worst of such mistakes is that other people suffer for them too," she mused aloud. "It is too late now."

"Yes," he agreed, "it is too late now!"

As Blanche opened the door, V. C. was shaking hands with Madge, and saying good-bye. "We are off to-morrow about eleven," he said. "Stick a Union Jack over your front gate, and wish us good luck, Mrs. Crofton."

"I will come down to the Station and see you pass through," Madge began. "No," she added, "I think I won't. Good-bye."

She had dropped her handkerchief as she rose. It lay at their feet, a little white morsel smelling of violets,



soft, lace-edged, infinitely feminine and delicate. For a moment he hesitated as if he were going to pick it up; then he turned away without a second look, and went. She understood that he would not have returned it to her, had he stooped for it; that was why he left it lying where it was.

"What a dreadful day!" Margery said when all her visitors, even Blanche, had gone. "I am really glad that they are leaving to-morrow. I could not have said good-bye to anyone else."

At dinner Lanse asked her who had called, and she told him.

"I was glad Blanche was here," she said, trying to speak lightly. "We were all very emotional. She was the saving element of sense."

"She is always woman of the world enough to be practical," said Lanse, dryly. "And her sense of humour is a thing to be dreaded. A woman of that sort is far less sentimental than the strongest man. These patties are awfully good, Madge. Have another?"

"No, thank you. I will feed up in moderation, but my appetite is not yet equal to your demands upon it."

"Have some more pontac then? — I wish you would drink port, though. It is much better for you. What is it, Mary?"

The Kaffir girl was standing at his elbow, hesitating evidently with something to say.

"Please, sir, there's a big fire, over at Newlands, they think," she said.

"By Jove! a bush fire, is there? If this wind holds it will spread, I'm afraid."

"Let's go out and see if we can see it, Lanse," said Margery. "I've quite done."

"Finish your wine then. I'm not going to let you off your medicine! And wrap up, dear. It's chilly!"

He caught up a long fur-trimmed wrap as they passed through the hall, and threw it over her shoulders.

There was no doubt about the extent of the fire; as they stepped out onto the stoep at the back of the house, Margery exclaimed. The whole country side was alight with a rosy glow, the bare fields and leafless trees looking black and mysterious, as if they were strange things suddenly revealed. Behind the long mountain line was a glare of intense light, every now and then a colossal tongue of flame leaping into actual existence, and displaying the volumes of smoke which were rolling along the crest before the wind.

"It is n't Newlands," said Lanse, with interest. "It's right behind the mountain. By Jove! I hope Groote Schuur won't suffer!"

"Poor Mr. Rhodes! Another fire!—no, I hope it won't. They can't get any water up there, Lanse. I wonder what caused it."

"Some fool of a Kaffir smoking. The bush has been dry enough to catch from the merest spark for the past week or so. They'll have to turn out the Rutlandshire, and tramp it out. If the wind shifts, it will threaten the Camp."

"How beautiful it is!" said Madge, as a great sheet of flame was tossed along the ridge, and hill and valley glowed out in black and rose colour in the momentary illumination. "Hark! there's some one riding along the road."

"Going to see if they can get near it," said Lanse, his tone crisp with excitement. "There's the bugle!—I said they would turn the Regiment out."

"How faint it sounds from here!" said Madge, half under her breath. She thought of the clearness of the call from Vine Lodge; they could hear it plainly there, she knew. The Rosary was further off.

"I've a great mind to have the Kaisir saddled and ride up there," said Lanse, with some indecision.

"Do!" said Margery, knowing that he wanted to go, and was hesitating for her. "I don't mind being left a

bit, and I want to know all about it. I can watch it from here."

"Don't catch cold then!" he said, as he ran down the steps and towards the stable. "Go in if you feel chilly, and have some more wine."

Margery laughed. A few minutes later she heard the horse's impatient hoofs on the gravel, and Lanse called to her as he passed, "Henry says it's spreading to Bishop's Court. But I shall go up to the Hen and Chickens first."

"It sounds like a public house!" said Madge, whimsically, to herself. "Who would guess that it was only three great stones. I wonder how those huge boulders got so far up the mountain-side, by the way."

She went into the house to see that the servants had cleared the table, and not congregated at the kitchen door to watch the fire, and then after a while returned to her vantage point on the stoep. The fire still burned steadily, the rolling, flame-dyed smoke sweeping fitfully over the hill, threatening the Camp if the fire once got a grip of the intervening wooded slopes, and the flames leapt merrily up to the black vault of sky. A watery moon was feebly disputing the lighting of the night with the fire, and flickered in and out among the leafless trees, with the scud of the flying clouds across her face. The wind still blew gustily, fanning the blaze. It was a large bush fire, and would prove terribly destructive before the soldiers could tramp it under. Margery watched it with admiration largely tempered by regret; she knew all the country which it was reducing to charred ugliness, and she was sorry to think of the great oaks and firs of Bishop's Court falling victims, for it had been one of her favourite rides. Lanse had been gone some twenty minutes when she heard the sound of hoofs again, and was wondering what brought him back so soon, when she realised that they had stopped in front of the house. It was not Lanse, but whoever it

was had evidently handed over his mount to one of the grooms, and was coming along the stoep — round the corner of the house — towards her.

She clenched her hands suddenly and tightly with spasmodic recognition of the step, even as a big figure came in sight, and her retreat was cut off.

“ Why do you come to-night — to-night —  
So many miles of wind and rain ? ”

Was there a wailing human voice in the wind that the words rang so distinctly in her ears? And was this not Lovelace incarnate in debonair beauty and reckless pursuit of an old love, denied him long since?

“ Colonel Vibart,” she said with sudden composure, holding out her hand. “ How do you do? I was watching the fire.”

“ I have been up there,” he said in the easy musical voice she knew so well. “ I was dining with the Rutlandshire, and when they turned out I went up also.”

“ Are they getting it under? ”

“ As far as possible. I am afraid it will do a good deal of damage. I met your husband up there,” he said abruptly.

So he knew that Lanse was out — and he had ridden down at once. Was that why? —

“ ‘ Why do you come to-night — to-night ?  
It might mean death to both of us ! ’  
‘ Oh, but I come with much delight —  
All things I love are dangerous ! ’ ”

She instinctively drew back, and his next words confirmed her fear.

“ I came because I wanted to see you alone,” he said gravely. “ I would not call, because I knew I should find half a dozen people here too. Rather than say good-bye like that, I would not have said it at all.”

She did not answer. The strain of the afternoon had softened her, and that word “ good-bye ” echoed



piteously in her mind. Her mood was, for the moment, more assailable than Vibart had ever found it since his return — than he would probably ever have found it again.

“Margery,” he began gently, but his voice deepened to passion as he went on, “after everything that has been between us — I must refer to it, though I know you would rather not — I find I can’t go quite away, with the chance of death before me, without saying good-bye to the woman I have loved best in the world !”

She looked up with a shiver as he spoke of that chance of death, already brought so near to her understanding to-day. He had thrown back the heavy military overcoat he wore, and his big figure in its handsome uniform seemed a startling contrast to the possibility of which he spoke. He was so splendid, — the old physical admiration of him, quite apart from any personal attraction, impressed Margery anew as she gazed up at his agitated face, from which all the debonair carelessness seemed to have flown in his unusual earnestness. Jack dead ! She could not realise it. All this animal beauty and frank vitality, whose very vices were the outcome of a too exuberant nature, shot down, as it well might be, like any lesser man ! She stared at him in wordless denial. He could not be killed ! But — there was the chance of it, as to any other soldier, and the thought disarmed her as no other appeal could have done.

“Madge, won’t you be kind to me just this once ?” he whispered, stretching out his arms. The red glow of the fire warmed both their faces and figures as if with the reflection of that long-dead passion.

She made a forward movement, still without speaking, and he took her in his arms. “Because this is good-bye, Jack !” she said, and their lips met.

“My darling, I never thought I should hold you close to my heart again,” he said brokenly. She did

not know what to say. She felt helpless under his tenderness, for she had nothing to give him back, and yet she was so sorry that her heart ached as it had not done when they parted before.

"Jack dear, please don't talk about being killed," she said with childish nervousness. "I can't bear to imagine it. I hope you will come back all right, and win great honour and glory." It sounded a trite little speech, but she struggled to express the best she could wish for him. She was folded in the circle of his arm, leaning against his broad chest as she had leaned so many times before, half wrapped in his overcoat. Her hand played mechanically with the lappet of his mess-jacket, and she felt the silver Greyhound under her fingers. "I am going Home very soon, you know. If it should happen that our lives are so divided that we never meet again, will you remember that I wished you — nothing but good?"

"You have given me nothing but good!" he said generously. "I wish you could have loved me a little longer, Madge!" Perhaps he thought, even then, that this was only a preface to a new phase, and that in the future he might win her back to him. Husbands and wives always drifted apart after a while, and then another love intervened. He had not allowed Madge time enough on his first return, but the re-action would come. It was his creed.

"I want to leave my ring with you, darling," he said, slipping the signet off his finger into her hand. "Take care of it for me, won't you? One does n't want to take anything one values to the front."

"Oh, Jack, I would rather not! And I have a book of yours I meant to give you back — those verses. It has your name in it, and I have never known what to do with it."

"Lock them both up," he said carelessly. "Good-bye, once more, my love!"

As he strained her to him she looked past him and saw the country-side alight with the red glare. She remembered with a shock that she had once called it the Garden of Eden ; and now she seemed to see Paradise alight with fire from the mouth of Hell. While it still dazzled her, his nearing face shut it out from her eyes, and he kissed her, . . . then his retreating foot rang along the stoep, she heard him speak to the groom as he took his horse, the hoof-beats died out into the night.

Farther, — farther yet, — the last faint echo falling on her sharpened senses ; it was as if she actually *heard* this man passing out of her life. Throughout he had come and gone like a thief in the night, — coming when the birds sang in Eden and the green morning was all sun and dew ; going when the land glowed with blood-red light, the same land that she had known by innocent day. To her fancy, the red sullen glare behind the mountains was the ominous light of the War, and Vibart rode away into the heart of it.

## CHAPTER XX

*"A new Eden-gate  
 Shall open on a hinge of harmony  
 And let you through to mercy. Ye shall fall  
 No more, within that Eden, nor pass out  
 Any more from it. In which hope move on,  
 . . . . . Live and love,—  
 Doing both nobly, because lowly."*

TRUMAN divided his dogs as legacies among his friends, four of the five remaining at Wynberg when their master departed for the Border, and rendering night hideous with their howling for a whole week before they settled down, and became resigned — for the time being. True had been Up Country to shoot, before, and had returned. The dogs maintained their air of being but on a visit to their new owners, and declined to commit themselves further. Mrs. Drysdale, in the largeness of her heart, had taken two — Miss Anderson and Wags. The Irish terrier was the more easily consoled, by reason of the society of Eric and Jan, and devoted himself to them and to their toys forthwith. Miss Anderson, the colley, did not care for little boys. She took to Ossy, and whenever he was at home sat close to his side, with pathetic eyes fixed on his face, until their appeal drew from him the comfort of sweet biscuits. They were very bad for her teeth, and hardly adequate to True ; but she seemed to feel her loss less while she munched. Ossy and Clarice stifled their consciences therefor, and placed the biscuit tin at her disposal.

The Retriever found a home at Simon's Town, and exchanged the Army for the Navy, whereby his inclinations towards water were fostered, and his aquatic per-



formances were the pride of three gun-boats and the little Club wherein all men gather, and of which he was made an honorary member.

The wire-haired Mongrel went, by special bequest, to Starling.

The fifth dog was the Japanese animal before mentioned, and was so ugly that True decided to take him with him at all risks. For he had no personal attractions which should recommend him to strangers; his worth lay in his heart, and that was so entirely his master's that it threatened to break if they were parted. The poor little fellow divined, with more than human quickness, that something unusual was in the air, and, unlike his canine companions, followed True about restlessly, superintending his packing, and twice curling himself up in a portmanteau and being very nearly strapped up and stifled, in the hurry. After that True decided to smuggle him through somehow, and he went. I believe he was in Kimberley throughout the Siege, and by a miracle escaped contributing to the sausages which proved so sustaining to the troops. He came out of the siege very thin and scraggy, it is reported, having developed an undying admiration for Mr. Rhodes. If he survives, he will probably be interviewed on his return to England, and would make the fortune of a Music-Hall Proprietor. But he will not be exhibited. This is strictly unofficial, and a digression.

Starling was out when True personally conducted the Mongrel to Friedenhof, and left him there. When she came in, she found Mrs. Johnnie trying to sooth the dog, with a line of anxiety between her brows, and timid blandishment in her tone, of which he took no notice.

"Oh, Starling!" she exclaimed with relief, as her daughter appeared. "I am so sorry you have been out! True has brought Romar for you, and left him here, and he is nearly wild. What *are* we to do with him? He tries to get out and go back to Camp, and

he will do nothing but run under that chair and growl when I speak to him ! ”

“ I ’ll show you,” said Starling, quietly. “ He ’ll settle down — after a time. Romar ! ”

The Mongrel advanced slowly, his tail wagging faintly. He knew Starling, and besides he recognised the tone of authority in her voice.

“ Come here, little fellow ! ” she said kindly. Romar sat down at her feet and looked at her. “ Your master has gone away,” said Starling. Romar’s eyes were more terrible to meet than a human being’s would have been. “ You ’ve got to stay behind, old boy. We ’re all in the same boat ! ” added Starling, inconsequently. “ We ’ve got to *wait*, Romar ! ”

Romar understood that word. When Starling rose and whistled to him, he came to heel and followed her. He seemed to have acknowledged her as temporary mistress, until he could make other arrangements.

“ He ’ll be all right,” said Starling, reassuringly. “ Did True come to say good-bye ? ”

“ I don’t know,” said Mrs. Johnnie, her kind eyes filling with tears. “ As you and your father were out, I suppose he thought he could n’t. Anyhow he said he would come in to-night. I can’t bear parting with him, Starling ! It is like losing my own son ! ” said the warm-hearted woman.

Starling drew up her throat with the little bird motion peculiar to her. She did n’t say anything. As she left the room, however, she spoke over her shoulder after her usual fashion. “ I ’m going to my den, Mother. Come along, Romar ! ”

Mrs. Johnnie wiped her eyes, and looked after her thoughtfully. “ What a good thing it is that there is no sort of nonsense, or any tie between her and True ! ” she said somewhat vaguely. “ She would feel it so now ! ” But she sighed half anxiously, and half regretfully. Mrs. Johnnie was hopelessly unworldly.

As they crossed the hall, Romar half paused, with a wistful look at the open hall door. "It's no use, Romar," Starling said, as quietly as if she were speaking to a rational being. "They go to-morrow — and we're to be left behind," she added to herself.

All that afternoon her own words rang in her ears, "They go to-morrow." — Go, without any tie between her and — anybody. But then she was a rich man's only daughter, and the Duke's were a proverbially poor regiment. If anybody, one of the Subalterns say, had been bold enough to ask Starling to marry him, would not he have run the risk of being dubbed fortune-hunter? Why, even a — Captain might well hesitate to put himself in such a false position, however disinterested he might really be, supposing that he were not a very brilliant match. Starling could quite appreciate any honest man's reluctance to offer her comparatively nothing — particularly on the eve of War, with such an uncertain future before him. Nevertheless she chafed against an untoward fate.

"It's such nonsense — it's a chimera between us. And yet, if I were he, I should n't speak. And a girl can't. But I feel so sure that I could — I could almost — do it myself!"

There had been passages in the last few weeks so far justifying her that there was really no occasion to flush as she did at the brazenness of her own suggestion. There was no one to see her, however — not even Romar, who was consoling his grief with a bone in the stables.

The day wore on in restlessness. Starling had expected that True would come to dinner; but he did not appear, the truth being that he, like his Colonel, was invited to the Rutlandshires. Starling, conscious that the frock she was wearing — it was black, and made her neck and arms the whiter by contrast — had been selected with a purpose, was naturally very angry with

herself. She was particularly bright and merry during the meal, and kept up quite a flow of conversation with her father. Mrs. Johnnie wiped her eyes in a surreptitious manner at intervals, as she had been doing all day. In the wideness of her heart she was experiencing the anxiety of all those mothers far away in England whose sons were leaving for the Border on the morrow, and fussing over them in her tender fancy. "Such nice boys, most of them!" she thought. "And we've known them all so well! Oh, God grant there will be no fighting, and no desolate homes in consequence! — I wonder if I could have done anything more for poor Miles Mowbray, or the Henderson boy, or Mr. Forrester! Ten to one half their socks need looking to, and the unmarried ones have to trust to soldier servants. I can darn and mend and see to clothes, if I'm good for nothing else. And young men are so careless!" Mrs. Johnnie had a humble opinion of her own accomplishments and intellectual powers; but she knew her heart was large enough to mother all the stray sons who came in her way.

The departing Regiment was so much in her mind as to make her unusually abstracted, which in her simplicity she thought escaped notice as much as her quiet tears. It did escape her husband's, because Starling talked partly to cover it, knowing quite well all that was passing in her mother's mind.

"Did you say True was coming in to say good-bye, my dear?" said Mr. Johnnie, at the end of dinner. "It's getting rather late for him. I hope he won't fail to turn up — I should be really sore about it, if True did n't come to say good-bye. He's been like one of the family!"

"I am sure he will come, dear," replied Mrs. Johnnie, in a rather tremulous tone. "He said he should turn up to-night for certain, when he brought Romar."

"Yes, but if those scamps at Camp get hold of him



and make a farewell night of it, they 'll make him drunk between them," said Mr. Johnnie, laughing. "I know what these special occasions are!"

"Never mind, Dad. If True is too — too overcome to drop in this evening, you can go to the Station tomorrow and see them pass through. You will have time to shake hands, I daresay," said Starling, consolingly. No one noticed her rather curious tone.

"So I shall!" said Mr. Johnnie, cheering up. "Well, I don't suppose he 'll come to-night." He glanced at the clock as he rose from the table. "They say there's a big bush fire, but I don't suppose we can see much of it from here. It's over the mountain. Will you come out and look, Starling?"

"No thanks, it's too cold," said Starling carelessly. "I am going to write some letters." As she departed to her own domain, it flashed across her, as it had done Lanse Crofton, that in the event of a big fire the Rutlandshire would be called out to tramp it under. In that case, their farewell night would be interfered with in some sort. And what would become of their guests? . . .

Starling walked round her "den" like a small lioness. Mr. Johnnie's innocent suggestion of True being too well entertained to care to come and say good-bye not only jarred on her taste by its broad picture of him as drinking too much wine, but was a humiliation in the light of her wild thoughts of the afternoon. He did not even care to come and say good-bye! And she had half thought of — She paused before certain of her possessions in turn, as she came upon them in her restless walk, and stared at them blankly. Major Yeats' assagai, for he also had contributed to Starling's collection of trophies, was decorated with the toys and ribbons of the last cotillion which she had led with Captain Ransom. She gave a little sigh for the memories that came up as she looked at the pretty rubbish, —

memories inextricably mingled with the sound of Madge's laughter, for she and Truman had been the next couple behind them. Truman again—always Truman! He had become so interwoven with her life in Wynberg that to fancy it without him was an impossibility. She almost wished that the breach between them, caused by his defection to Madge during her absence in England, had never been bridged over. It had all been satisfactorily explained and forgiven at the Sapper's ball, and since then they had been more intimate than ever. But it only made things worse now,—and perhaps worse still in the future, when he should be gone but a host of little things would remain to keep him in memory. There was the little regimental badge that he had given her—the silver Greyhound of the Duke's; among the whips and stick in her rack was an oak sapling which she used more than any of them—that was also his gift. He had never falsified the position by sending her a present whose value would have made her hesitate to accept it; they were all such simple little gifts that she had taken them with unthinking pleasure, and they all carried an individual remembrance. She need not part with any of them, but she did not dare to put them away out of sight as relics, for fear any one should notice their absence. They must always be there to haunt her, her woman's fear of question outweighing her very regret; poor Starling! she writhed as she gazed round her and found a fresh pang on every hand. And the cause of it all was making a farewell night of it in Camp, and drinking too much wine by persuasion of the Rutlandshire's hospitality, so that he had not come to say good-bye! Dad had been quite correct in his judgment of a fellow brute, no doubt; for men always knew one another, and were all equally disgusting. . . .

“May I come in, please?”

True stood smiling in the doorway, his quick step having hardly made her start before he himself ap-

peared. He had come down from Mess, and his uniform made a gay blot of colour against the dark walnut of the den. He looked a handsome little fellow, square-shouldered and alert, with the beautiful trained ease of his profession in every movement. Starling's face altered in the second in which she turned to greet him, all the softness and bitter grief of a minute since hidden by a quick laugh that showed her pretty teeth; her neck and arms gleamed white and firm against her dinner gown, she looked self-possessed, unobtrusively conscious of her own prettiness, while her brown eyes met his with debonair candour. There was no hint of a shadow between them; they smiled gaily, man and maid, with a parting before them that might last them all their lives.

"Oh, I thought you were unable to tear yourself away from the Rutlandshire!" said Starling, coolly. "I am glad you have managed to turn up, True, — Dad was quite disappointed when he thought you were n't coming."

"You knew I should n't go without saying good-bye! I put it off till the last moment on purpose," he said in his quick, gentle voice, and his pretty smile was readier than ever. He had never moved his eyes from her face since he entered the room; it embarrassed Starling a little after the indignant accusations against him which she had made in her own mind. As to the — the other thing, her courage was scattered to the four winds, and she stood appalled before the mere vision of her half-formed intention. Was it possible that only this afternoon she had thought that she could — that she would —

"Have you seen Dad and Mother?" she said guiltily, shying away from her own thoughts. "There was a bush fire, and they went out to look."

"I know. I found them all on the stoep, with Livingston and Drysdale. They told me you were in here, so I came!"



"Oh, Mr. Livingston has turned up, has he? I have n't seen him. Is it a bad fire?"

"Pretty bad. The Rutlandshire have been turned out, — we had hardly finished dinner. I came straight down then."

"It must have been rather a break up to their guest night," said Starling. "Well, do sit down, as you have come, and let's have a chat, — it is the last we shall have for many a long day, I suppose. Do you sail in the *Tyrant*?"

"Yes," said True. He paused in his usual fashion, and then spoke with soft abruptness. "We go to-morrow!"

"Yes, I know," said Starling, vaguely, but it struck her that she had not known, to realise it, until then. She looked at True's smart figure and familiar face in the arm-chair which had become known as his from his constant occupation of it, and tried to impress it on herself that to-morrow his place would be irrevocably empty, and all the little customary jokes and incidents between them would gradually fade into hazy memory.

"I suppose there is no chance of your being ordered back to Cape Town?" she said. "We must have *some* troops left here!"

"No, I don't think so. By the time the Rutlandshire leave, there will be more out; but I fancy those regiments already in the country will be drafted to the front first, and come in for the first potting, if War is declared. I am afraid all the big fights will pass us by."

There came a little pause. Starling felt desperately that had she not had that terrible intention this afternoon she would have launched into regrets, and said how sorry she was. It would have been infinitely the best thing to do, if she could have done it naturally; as it was, she felt as if he were in danger of guessing the



reason of her unresponsiveness, and yet she could not speak further of his departure.

"Who was dining with the Rutlandshire as well as you?" she said at last.

"The Tracker, and Silence, and one or two more. Silence is coming on here presently. We are all making rather late calls, I am afraid!"

Another pause. "Oh, this is dreadful!" thought the girl, divided between nervousness and misery. She had never felt so much constraint with him before, except on that night of the Sapper's ball, of which she had spoken to Mrs. Drysdale.

"What a state of mind I should be in if I had really decided to come to an understanding with him somehow!" she thought. "Thank Heaven, he doesn't even know that I half intended to — and he never need know. He will go to-morrow. . . . I wonder how I shall feel when he is gone, — True gone! . . . I can't bear it!"

She jumped up without thinking of the strangeness of her action, and began walking restlessly about the room again.

"I can't imagine you quite out of this neighbourhood, I have got so used to you," she said, and then added recklessly, "I wish I were coming too!"

"So do I!"

("Then why don't you ask me!" thought the girl.) "I might go through to Durban, and see you again there! What fun it would be!" she said aloud.

"It would be very nice!" remarked True, rather obviously, and checked himself in the middle of a sigh.

"I have a great mind to volunteer. I have passed all my Ambulance exams, and Mrs. Reynolds is going with her husband as far as Maritzburg on the strength of that," said Starling. ("I am talking nonsense, but it is only a means to an end. He won't do it, — so I must.") "Don't you think I could come?" She felt

rather wild and light-headed, and was fingering the little silver hound lying on the writing table as she spoke.

"You know you can't —"

"Can't I? Then I suppose I must be content with writing to you. But letters might never reach you, and then you would think I had n't written. . . . Do you know, True, I found out something to-day —"

He did not speak. Perhaps her words had surprised him too much. Starling turned round and faced him with desperate courage. He was still looking at her, and she rushed into her next speech.

"I found out that I was — very fond of you — and we've been such good friends that it does n't matter my telling you, and if you don't, — I mean if you only like me a little please say so, and don't think you must n't! Only I thought it was a pity, — and it's for all our lives perhaps, and we might drift apart — and supposing you were killed, we should have had nothing — and if you really cared, and you did n't like to say so — I wanted — I meant —"

If only his eyes had not been so very large and liquid! If only he would look away! Starling became more and more involved as she went on, and at last her voice dropped to a distressed pause, and her own eyes filled with tears of shame and desperation.

"True, don't you understand?" she said almost angrily. "Can't you ask me to marry you? Oh, if you say you can't, I shall simply go away somewhere, much further than the Border, and it does n't matter!"

True had had no real chance to say a word; but he had listened with all his senses, and they were many. He had understood the incoherent, stammering speech perfectly well, long before the end, and much better than Starling did herself; but he had not been able to break in quick enough to help her. He got up from his chair, however, and came towards her; he could not interrupt the stumbling sentences, but he held out

his arms, and Starling literally fell into them. Perhaps at the moment he had nothing to say, for in flash he saw before him a coming half hour in which Mr. Johnnie sat on one chair and he on another in the wilderness of the empty drawing-room, while he haltingly explained his own beautiful lack of fortune and utter inadequacy as a match for a rich man's only child. There were debts, too, — not many, thank Heaven! but enough to make him "comfortably embarrassed," as Forrester said. True's feelings were sobered with the question of honour, and his reputation as a gentleman if he took the advantage thrust into his hands; but he was hardly iron-souled enough to resist the moment's happiness, and not to show his appreciation of the white arms round his neck by taking every opportunity that the position offered him. Half blinded by her own tears, and the suddenness of it all, Starling rested where she was for a full minute, — sixty long joyous seconds of which True made good use; then she disgraced herself by hiding her face against his shoulder, and sobbing with all her heart.

"Oh, how could I do it? Oh, I wish I had n't!" she said inconsequently. The irrationality of feminine nature which weeps over an accomplished design was beyond Truman's comprehension, but with characteristic wisdom he did not struggle with the problem. He gave himself up to administering comfort without words until the sobs subsided.

"Do you think me very mad?" she asked with a final catch in her breath, and a little shake of herself. "There! I am not going to cry any more, anyhow. True, what *do* you think of me?"

"The arm-chair is big enough for two," said Truman with serene tact. "I'm very small!" As he tucked himself comfortably down beside her, he added, "I have so often wanted to ask you to try sharing it!"

He looked at her with his beautiful expressive eyes,



and Starling accepted the deeper meaning hidden behind the arm-chair.

"It seems rather a pity you did n't," she remarked ruefully. "Here you are going away to-morrow, and if you had only had a little more sense it need n't have been left to me to do at the last moment!"

"I'm very sorry," said True, meekly. There was a little air of appropriation about Starling's taking to task that he much appreciated. "Had n't we better make the most of what time we have?" he added suggestively. Now the arm-chair, although large for one, was too narrow for two to allow of anything but excessively close quarters, and the black frock and the red coat were getting hopelessly entangled, when a voice in the doorway caused a wild scramble, before they could extricate themselves and realise that Mr. Dodd was regarding them in ludicrous amazement.

"Well, I'll be damned!" said the Millionaire, blankly. He gazed at the guilty couple, and took in Starling's crimson face and Truman's obvious discomfiture, as he stood in the doorway, looking stouter than usual in his dress clothes, and with a sense of injury pervading his whole person. The dominant thought in both Starling's and Truman's minds, however, was not compunction or abasement, but an earnest desire to know how long he had been present, and what he had seen and heard.

"So mean of him to come in on us like that!" thought Mr. Johnnie's dutiful daughter. "Why could n't he have knocked?"

He had, several times, but they had been too well entertained to notice it.

"Beastly awkward!" thought True, so nonplussed for the moment that he stood silent, pulling his moustache, and embarrassment making his eyes darker than their wont. "What fools we must have looked!" then he recovered himself, and turned to Mr. Johnnie with his usual serenity. "Did you want us?" he said.



"Yes, I did," said Mr. Johnnie, bluntly, and staring from one to the other in a way that expressed more than any words could have done. "We are going to play pool. Will you both come?"

"In one moment — going to brush my hair," murmured Starling, making a dash for the door. Her face was still very rosy, and there was an unusually shy atmosphere about her whole figure. As she passed her father in the doorway, she glanced up with the soft brown eyes that were still moist. "I'm so happy!" she whispered with a hurried embrace, and rushed away, leaving Mr. Johnnie breathless from her onslaught.

"Upon my word!" he exclaimed, as she disappeared. "Starling is really too violent, she makes a dash for me and forgets how stout I am. Well, Captain Truman —" He paused, and looked at his victim. Truman drew himself up instinctively, with the set of his shoulders which generally came on Parade. His wide steady gaze never faltered before Mr. Johnnie's.

The Millionaire suddenly stepped forward and grasped him by the hand. "Look here, True," he said huskily, "I see how it is, and — and I'm grateful to you for putting that look into my little girl's face, for she is evidently as happy as she ever will be in this life. It's all right, my boy — I know. You'll write to me to-morrow, or when you have time. We won't spoil your last evening with business. I sha'n't be hard on you," added Johnnie Dodd, with his high laugh, — it was the sweetest music Truman had ever heard. "And I'm damned if I would n't rather have you as a son-in-law than any man in the damned world, for I believe you're about the best fellow in the whole damned Army."

Mr. Johnnie was excited, and the damns flew. Truman never really remembered what followed; but he had a distinct impression of shaking hands heartily, and feeling far more heady than he ever did after a farewell night at Mess.

"Now, we'll go to the billiard-room," said Johnnie, blowing his nose officiously. "I wonder where that rogue of a girl has got to? A mean skunk, I call her, deserting like that and leaving you to bear the brunt of it all!"

"I can't hear anything against Starling, sir!" Truman reminded him in his usual soft tones. "Shall I switch off?"

As he extinguished the light, and followed his host, he added inwardly, "What a fool I was not to do that half an hour ago! It's a relief he knows without my telling him, and we've got the worst of it over, but — I would rather he had n't seen *quite* so much!"

## CHAPTER XXI

*“ Yea, I plucked the fruit  
With eyes upturned to Heaven, and seeing there  
Our god-thrones as the tempter said — not God.  
My heart, which beat then, sinks. The sun hath sunk  
Out of sight with our Eden.*

*Night is near.”*

PERHAPS, of all months, November is the most beautiful in Wynberg. September and October are the real spring, but they are still chilly, and the mornings and evenings are treacherous. November breathes a fore-taste of summer, and yet the effect of the winter rains is still making the land cool and green. It is fresh and dewy and exquisite, and the earth blooms and sings with a great rejoicing.

Margery stood at the gate of the Rosary one morning in November, and looked over the land before her with the eye of benediction, for their boat sailed on the morrow, and she was going Home. She thought, as was inevitable, of her first introduction to Wynberg, and the impression made on her mind by the sparkling sunny scene before her. And she wondered when, if ever, she should see it again. For the Colony — the green, smiling Colony, where Nature laughed, and flowered, and multiplied as always — was convulsed with the War, and men and women looked upon their very homes with unacknowledged doubt, as on something which might be taken from them, and from which they might come to flee. Glencoe and Elanslaaghte had been fought, the isolation of Ladysmith was imminent, and the first Army Corps was only on its way out. In two short months the red storm of rebellion, and slaughter, and disaffec-



tion had swept down from North to South, and shaken the apparently firmly established settlement to its foundations. The fitful social life round about Cape Town still went on — Margery had called at Government House only a few days since, for the household had returned to Newlands; but it seemed to her, as to most of the women in those days, a horrible mockery of the old friendly festivities, punctuated with the news of men's deaths, — men who a few short months since were doing all this too, calling on the Governor, riding out to Tokai, betting at the gymkanas and the Race Meetings, dining at this or that house, which now mourned them as friends sacrificed in the first moves of the War, as pawns are sacrificed in a game of chess.

There was no outward alteration in the Rosary, — no appearance of desolation such as besets houses whose owners are leaving them, as a rule. Lanse had let the place furnished, and the only difference to Margery's eyes was in the removal of her little personal belongings, photos which had some of them already become relics, books, and pictures. She had had one last tennis afternoon, following the lead of other women who kept the ball rolling bravely, and went the usual round as though they had no secret fears, but kept their serene faith in the Empire. That tennis had been marked in Margery's mind by hearing then for the first time that Wynberg Camp was to be turned into a hospital; it came upon her with a shock, and afterwards the afternoon was always inextricably associated in her mind with the news, which she overheard two of her guests telling each other. In the same way a dinner party at Friedenhof stood out in her mind as the occasion of hearing that Teddy Barton had been wounded, and it was feared that he would lose his arm; and the first cricket match appeared to her a forlorn gathering, so many familiar faces were absent, and was only noticeable for the news of a skirmish in which the British had lost heavily, three men she



knew being amongst those killed. She had a shrinking fear of going out, for dread of what she should hear, and yet she went, because to stay at home was unendurable.

The pony and cart came round to the gate for the last time, and Margery went out slowly and got in beside the Kaffir boy, whose broad brown face was gloomy with the coming parting. He had liked his service with the Baas and the Missus, and the absence of his usual flashing smile and display of white teeth struck Margery afresh with a sense of loss. Even this little drive was one of those every day occurrences which she was doing "for the last time," and Henry knew it as well as she. The postman came up to the gate just as they were starting, and she bent down and took her letters from him, conscious that her eyes were moist, and hoping that he would put it down to her correspondence. News, alas ! brought tears more often than not in those days.

The letters were both, as it happened, in the same hand, — from Miles Mowbray, as Margery saw with the spasm at her heart that the Natal postmark brought even to the least interested among those who watched the War. There had been some delay in transmission which accounted for both arriving together. The first letter was a long one, and was dated October 27th. Margery read it with eager intent, while Henry drove her soberly along the leafy red lanes in which the sunlight lay in golden patches, and the hedges were growing blue with plumbago again. They were going Campwards, for a farewell visit to the Hospital ; but the familiar road slid by unheeded as Margery devoured her letter —

DEAR MARGERY, — I suppose I ought to say Mrs. Crofton, but I sha'n't, and you can't scold me all this way off ! — Many and various have been our wanderings since I last wrote to you, and I have been in action — but I can't say I felt in the least excited ; it was just like an ordinary Field day. You know we were sent down to reinforce Maritzburg, to our deep disgust, as fighting was expected

here (Ladysmith). But on Thursday we were recalled from Colenso, where they had kept us waiting about, and to our astonishment, when we fell in, we started on the road back the way we came. Half our battalion was escort to baggage, and as we did n't fall in till 5 A. M., I had a little more sleep than I expected, and a mouthful of bread. Major Reynolds, who was in command of the baggage train, threw out a small infantry advance guard, and told us what was happening before we started, and that we should probably encounter the enemy, for it seems we were used as a decoy duck, and that it was hoped the Boers would think that a large force had marched from Ladysmith, and attack us. They did n't, though. I was commanding the advance guard, and if there had been an engagement I should have got something; but I am sorry to say we saw nothing of the enemy. We got back to Ladysmith about 10 A. M. on Monday morning, and during our absence the battles of Dundee and Elanslaaghte had been fought. Oh, I am sick, and so is every one else! We got orders again on the Monday evening, and on Tuesday morning we fell in, reached the rendezvous, and were despatched as second line. About five miles out we saw a group of men on the crest of a ridge between high hills, about three thousand yards or more away, and we were looking at them through field glasses and wondering who they were, when, puff! came some smoke, and we then realised that it was the enemy in position, and that they were shelling our cavalry. The Rutlandshire, who were leading, immediately deployed and formed for attack, and as they were advancing a shell plumped down less than one hundred yards from our leading company, but did n't burst. Our men simply choked with delight, and then the guns advanced, and the enemy, who had got the range beautifully, put a shell straight into them. I expected to see several killed and wounded, but luckily the shell again did n't burst, and nobody was hurt. One Officer had his haversack carried away and his horse wounded, but no further damage was done. Then we got the order to get under cover, and we marched our forces absolutely unmolested behind a hill, deployed under cover, and advanced to within two thousand yards, range behind the guns, with the bullets whisking all round us. One

bullet struck between Hard Lines and myself, and two more came in quick succession, one passing on my left, and the other in front of us. I saw old Yeats pounding away with his battery; but we lay mightily low, I can tell you. Strangely enough as I said, I did n't feel in the least nervous or worried, though it was the first time I had been under fire, and only bobbed once, and that when a bullet passed so close to my ear that I felt the wind of it. When we got up to the guns, we lay down; but I strolled up to the front and watched the shells exploding over the enemy's position. It was very interesting; you could see the Boers plainly, coming out by twos and threes, and then when a good many had collected, bang would go one of our guns, and a shell would burst right among them, and they'd scuttle back under cover. Our guns played on their position for six hours, and we stayed there and looked on. Two horses were killed within a few yards of where I was, and I hear that Teddy Barton was wounded. The men were quite unconcerned, and were chatting and smoking all the time. Shortly after 2 P. M. the order came to retire, and anything more casual and happy-go-lucky I never saw. Our men halted under effective artillery fire to get water from the cart, and as the shells came screaming overhead, they kept saying, "Oh, lor! There's another rocket, Mother!" The enemy's big gun was silenced early in the day, and they kept their other guns out of sight and under cover until we retired. Very little damage was done by their artillery fire; it's most odd that they don't seem able to get the shells to burst. I believe we dusted the Boers a good deal, but of course we can't tell, as they cleared out as soon as we did, and it is believed that they've gone to Acton Holmes, which is about thirty miles from here. On Wednesday we did nothing, but to-day we are ordered out, or rather are told to be in readiness to march if necessary to cover the retreat of the Dundee column. I am on outpost duty to-night. We fall in at 5 P. M. to support the others. Do write to me as long as communication is open. It's going to be a long business, and goodness knows when I shall see you again, as you will be going Home soon I suppose. I've written you a very shoppy letter, but I don't suppose you will find fault



with that, as, after all, news that is reliable is most likely very scarce down your way.

If you write, as I am sure you will, do tell me of the movements down in the Cape. I expect I shall receive your letters very irregularly, but I do look for them so. You know I can't help thinking of you awfully, still. I hope you did n't mind what I said to you on that day we rode together to Tokai, and the day I left. Sometimes I'm afraid you did, though you were always so sweet and good about it. But you know I did n't mean anything except to warn you, and just to tell you how I thought of you, and that I could n't bear to hear your name spoken lightly for that very reason. I've got your photo with me. It smiles at me so sweetly — just as you used to do. Dearest Madge (you don't mind my saying that this once, do you?), I want to tell you, in case anything happens to me in this campaign, that it made me awfully happy to love you, and I look up to women all the more for having known you, and seeing, through you, how good and sweet they can be. I thought I must just tell you this.

Good-bye — I must turn in now, I'm so awfully sleepy, and I've got to be up early, as well as on that beastly outpost.

Yours always,

MILES MOWBRAY.

Margery folded the letter almost reverently, and put it away with the tears hanging on her lashes and making the slits of blue between them as misty as the blue mountains which quivered and scintillated in the heat. Mowbray's faith in her, and devotion to the idol he had made, was always a pang to her. She almost thanked God that he had never known that it had feet of clay. She hoped he never would know. The second letter was very short — merely a scrap written a day or so previously, and referring to a possible engagement, the news of which had not yet reached Wynberg, —

DEAREST MADGE, — As we are expecting a fight on Saturday — or possibly later — we fell in at one last night, and were marched back to Camp, and are now surrounded



on three sides by Boers. We move out to the attack to-morrow. You know I don't think much of the Tracker in private life, but I must own he's a splendid soldier. I'm glad he's leading us rather than Massy, one of our Majors who came out lately, and has gone with some of our fellows to Kimberley. They are acting as mounted infantry, and I suppose you know that True is with them?

As I write I can see the Boers massing on the hills not two thousand yards away, and to-morrow I hope we are going to do for them. Please excuse pencil, as there is no kind or sort of thing in the way of pen or ink here. Good-bye for the present. I don't anticipate being killed in the least, but if I am, you won't quite forget me, will you, Madge?

Yours,

MILES MOWBRAY.

Henry pulled up in front of the Mess, now converted into the Officers' wards. Margery had arranged to meet Starling there, and found she had arrived first, and was standing on the stoep as she alighted.

"Where is Mr. Crofton?" she said, as they shook hands.

"He had to go to the wine farm to make some final arrangements. I have just heard from Miles Mowbray, Starling."

"Have you? Of course I have n't heard from True since Kimberley was invested." Starling smiled a little; it was a very tender smile, if a sad one. "He was terribly hard-worked when he last wrote, poor old fellow! He said he was very footsore and weary, and had only had three meals in as many days. They had only just been drafted off there, you know, and I think they set them to work at once. I don't know what they were doing, for I understood they were to be mounted Infantry; but he said he had been having no breakfast or lunch, only dinner each day, consisting of bread and stew, and when he did get a meal he was absolutely famished. That sounds almost as if they had been on march, does n't it?"

"Poor True! It seems to me that the troops out here have had the brunt of it. They always said they should get the 'dirty work' you know."

"I am not certain," said Starling, doubtfully. "Dad says there will be a lot of nasty fighting for the Home contingent."

"Miles says that Ladysmith is nearly surrounded. Oh, Starling, I can't bear the look of this place now!"

For they had entered the Mess, and were standing in the long room where they had so often danced, and had gay little suppers after theatricals and concerts at Camp. It was to be the Officers' ward, the long table where the Duke's, and the Rutlandshire, and many other regiments had displayed their mess-plate, was gone now; down the room ran rows of beds, empty, *waiting*! There were no Officers in hospital yet, but the men had come down from Durban in the *Felunga* to relieve the hospitals there, and about one hundred and fifty were in the tents round about.

"Good-morning, Nurse," Starling said, as a quiet figure entered. "We have brought some flowers."

"Oh, is it you, Miss Dodd? I was wondering who it could be! I saw the carts drive past our quarters."

"Have you many patients?" Madge steadied her voice to ask. The sight of those asking beds had unnerved her.

"No bad cases, I am glad to say. We have a good many men here, and are expecting many more. We can put seven or eight in a tent, you know."

"I hope it will not come to that!" Starling put in quickly.

"There have been big fights last Thursday and Friday it is thought," said the nurse, with quiet significance. "We have no Officers as yet. I think they keep them up there, as they have none too many, and if they recover they will be wanted for duty again at once."

"They seem to be picking off the Officers as before,"

Starling said slowly. Her lips were rather white, but she still smiled at the nurse.

"I am afraid so."

Madge put her flowers into the nurse's hands suddenly, and went out of the Mess. She drew a long breath as of relief when she found herself on the stoep looking across the quiet Camp dotted with little white tents. There were no bugles sounding now, no band flinging its merry music across the startled air, hardly any soldiers to be seen. It was as quiet and primitive as the heart of the country in England.

Starling came out of the Mess after a few minutes; she had stopped to talk to the nurse. "What was it, Madge?" she said.

"Nothing — only those rows of beds — waiting! And I've danced there so often — oh, Starling, it is like dancing over your partners' grave! I can't think how one goes on with one's personal life at times like these; but that one does, makes it all the more strange and unreal to me. I feel it can't be true! — those men we've known so well — we've all been so intimate — they were just like everybody else, with the same chances in life. And now to think of them dead — shot down suddenly. And they don't even count much, and the whole great horrible War goes on as if such details as a few lives were nothing. It is just as if the Nation were a huge Juggernaut which is rolling over us, and there is nothing to save us!"

"Of course if the skies fell at every sore heart's desire, there would be no world!" said Starling, a little tiredly. "I suppose we have never realised till now how awful war is. That is what makes it seem so intolerable to us."

"Poor Starling, it is worse for you than for me! I am very selfish. But people talk of nothing but the War, and it makes me so unsettled I don't know what to do. I frivol about, and try to amuse myself and other people,



and all the time I feel as if my world had come to an end ! ”

“ Mine very nearly has,” said Starling, with a sudden stir of passion in her soft voice. “ In spite of all I have, — my own dear people, and my friends, and everything, — life seems so empty and full of heartache. I did n’t know I saw so much of True ; but now he ’s gone, it is all so quiet ! No one rings at the bell — no one comes along the stoep — there seems to be a great lull since August.”

Madge slipped her hand inside the arm nearest her, with a little impulsive caress. She had no comfort to offer save that of the tenderness of human touch. Starling stood silent for a moment ; then she suggested visiting one of the tents where she had been before, to see a poor fellow who was paralysed. Madge turned sick at the sights and sounds of suffering, but she kept it to herself and bravely followed Starling through the tents, seeing in her imagination all the familiar faces of the men she had known distorted with just such suffering, picturing them crippled for life in just the same way. She was trembling when at last they walked back to the spot where they had left the carts, and paused to shake hands with the nurse.

“ This is Mrs. Crofton’s farewell visit,” Starling said. “ She is going Home. I shall come next week, Nurse.”

“ I wish you a good voyage, Mrs. Crofton ! ” said the nurse, cordially. “ And I wish you would hurry England up a little when you get there ! There has been a great outcry over the slowness of the Home Authorities, has n’t there, Miss Dodd ? ”

“ Yes, but the reinforcements are really on their way now,” Starling acknowledged. “ And the Indian troops were arriving on the 11th. What a lot of excitement the commanding of the gold by the S. A. R. caused did n’t it ? Dad said Cape Town was like a beehive when the news came down.”



"Lanse thought they would do that," Madge put in. "But it was a bold step. I wonder if any news will get through to-day. The lists after the battles do take such a time to reach us. I am afraid I shall not hear before I go."

"I feel as if I only lived for the paper," said Starling honestly. "And especially the later editions. I know Dad must bring *some* news, so I simply wait for him at the Station whenever he goes into Cape Town. Good-bye, Madge! I shall see you on board, to-morrow."

"Yes, and don't be late, Starling. One seems to have so little time before the boat starts. Home, Henry!"

The little familiar word struck her afresh as she said it. It was again "for the last time." She would not give that order and drive back to the pretty old house for many a long day after to-morrow. Her eyes were dim as she turned round in the cart to look at the Camp on the sunny slope,—a farewell look that tried to impress every detail on her memory. Then the cart swung out into the deep red lanes with the thick trees, just in full foliage, meeting overhead. Hill and valley, stream and meadow, deep lanes and garden-land and familiar houses,—they flashed past merrily in the sunshine, to the bowling of the swift wheels over the warm-hued earth. Margery looked upon her Paradise as Eve looked upon the visible Eden when she left it; but she knew in her heart that she had forfeited it long since. It was only the outward and tangible sign, this passing out of the East Gate, and the Angel with the flaming sword was visible to her alone, as he had been visible all along. Yet she realised an irrevocable change, even in the relations of outward things with her existence. She might return here some day; but it would never be quite the same, for there was an alteration in herself.

"This is the end—of that chapter at any rate," she thought. "Can any other be as sweet, as full of life

and terror and tragedy? I have suffered, but then I have also lived. Perhaps Clarice was right — without that terrible experience to develop me, I might have missed Lanse, and yet — and yet — oh, what would I not have given to have had no former experience, to have been all his! I don't know about the wages of sin being death, but they are certainly pain! Sometimes I feel as if I had not been true to either man — as if I were not even worthy of Jack.

“‘I have been faithful to thee, Cynara, in my fashion!’

My fashion has always been an uncertain thing, blown about by every impulse, not even true to itself! — I wonder why I felt no remorse for kissing Jack at the end! — it was only an impulse, like all the rest, and yet I don't feel as if that had been any disloyalty. Perhaps I am coming to realise that human nature is so ruled by impulse, and the force of an unexpected crisis, that it has hardly any free-will at all. One can only flee from temptation. It is no good thinking that one is superior to the rest of the world, and able to resist. After this War, if there is any chance of meeting him again, I will escape somehow; I won't lay myself open even to the influence of pity. . . . I must give Lanse Miles's letter to read. He will be interested. Oh, no, I don't think I can though, — I will read it *to* him — all but the end. I can't read him the end. . . . Yes, last days are queer things always, — I feel that sense of ending a chapter very strongly on me now — and such a chapter! There can never be another like it!”

The perfect day rounded and drooped to an equally perfect night. Margery wandered out of the house after dinner, and stood at the gate. The garden was full of roses, full of the scents and sounds of summer, and the fireflies were a strange sight, they filled the dark with flying jewels. Summer had many associations for

Margery that winter had not, and the garden at night had a pang beyond all telling, though it was not haunted with absolute associations like that at Vine Lodge. Lanse had been giving some last instructions to the men; but he joined her after a few minutes, and came and leaned on the gate beside her. His voice heralded him, for he was singing a bar of a song as he came, and the beautiful liquid notes floated across the still air and gave Margery an additional sense of pleasure. Lansing had a really exceptional voice, with that strange quality in it like the vibration of a violin string.

"But youth is wayward, and the world is wide, —  
You're sure to wander sometimes from my side!"

he sang as he reached the gate, and stood beside her. "Tired, dearest?"

"No, Lanse."

"Sorry to leave?"

"A little — I'm taking the best of it with me, though." She turned quickly, with a secret greed of the treasure of his love, and touched him half timidly, as if to assure herself of his actual presence. His arm stole round her waist, and she laid her head against his breast.

"What a romantic couple we are, spooning in the starlight after being married the best part of a year!" he said.

"I'm glad there is no moon — I like the starlit nights better," she said. "Lanse — I was thinking — before you came out —"

"Well?"

"Supposing we had never cared for each other? We might not have done, you know. We might just have drifted past, as I have seen hundreds of men's and women's lives drift, partly because they had n't time to know each other, I think sometimes. Life changes so here, you know — the men come and go, and the girls



go Home, and liking doesn't always develop into loving. We might have been like that."

"You did your best for it, anyhow! How often did you say No?"

"Oh, I thought —" The pain of her refusal came back across all the after happiness, and stung her with its reason. "I thought you were going to care for Starling, and I was dreadfully jealous!" she said more lightly.

"I never cared for any one but you, and I never meant to marry any one but you. Did n't you know that?"

"I thought you had given it up!"

"I never give things up," said Lanse, and he spoke the truth. "If you had married another fellow — well, then I should probably have tried to wreck his home! I know I'm a beast — but I never pretended to be a saint."

Margery gasped. The queer clashing of coincidences in the suggestion of his words made her giddy. "Don't let's talk of what might have been," she said inconsistently. "It is not so — and we are happy."

He laughed a little in his full content. "Yes, and we will go on proving marriage not a failure, eh?" he said. "I say, Madge, — I hope — supposing there were contingent Circumstances? I should like it, should n't you?"

"What do you mean?" she asked, really puzzled; but as he turned his head and kissed her she understood. "Oh!" she said a little blankly. The possibility of adding to the perfect circle which made their married life and held them only, had not troubled her of late. At first she had had to face it as an inevitable possibility, but had soon thrust it into the background of her mind for reasons she would hardly own even to herself; as long as the absolute and accomplished fact was not an immediate consideration, she was content to put it by as a thing of the future, and had succeeded in laying the



spectre of her own doubts and fears. Now Lanse's direct reference brought it up before her again; she asked herself, in the shock of the moment, if she were fit to be the mother of his children. It seemed a more solemn responsibility than to be his wife, long as she had hesitated over that, even. "Am I good enough?" she asked in her humiliated knowledge of her past self. "For all my efforts, and my honest life in the present, does not that dead self rise up to prove what I can be? Oh, supposing — supposing — I gave some dreadful weakness of my own nature to an unborn human being! Or, supposing my influence were unconsciously bad!" . . . Her own words recurred to her — "I do not know about the wages of sin being death, but they are certainly pain!"

"I suppose every man looks forward to having children — sometime," said Lanse, with beautiful indefiniteness. "Would you mind, dearie?"

"Not if you wished it, Lanse."

She spoke slowly, facing the inevitable. Her elastic nature recoiled from the morbid dread of those remorseful thoughts, and she comforted herself with the frank prayer that she might do her best.

"You would n't be afraid, my darling?" That was the husband whispering to the wife under the eternal boughs of Paradise, as it was in the beginning and ever shall be; and the anxiety of his love challenged the courage of hers.

"No, dear, of course not. We will hope it will be so — as you wish it."

The wistful reservation passed him by. Only the silence and sweetness of the night closed them round, and the Southern stars flashed overhead, and the fireflies made trails of light across the garden. Then Madge spoke again, as if her words came out of the beauty of it all.

"Lanse, do you know I once called Wynberg the Garden of Eden?"

"Did you? Why?"

"I thought it looked like it. We are going away from Paradise into the outer World — that's all."

"We can leave the gate ajar — and come back."

"Some one else might go in instead, in the mean time!" said Margery, laughing. "What nonsense I am talking! — But it is safer to lock the Gates of Paradise, even if one hopes to return there!"

. . . . .

As Margery had feared, the lists of killed and wounded in the last fight had not come through by the next morning. The paper could give few details, and with a sigh she put her anxiety aside, as not to be answered as yet, unless the news reached Madeira by cable from England before they touched there.

It was a fair day, with a little scented wind. Wynberg laughed behind them as they left it; Cape Town simmered and hummed in the heat, for the heart of existence was here, and humanity was astir with the War. The very docks had a crowded, unusual appearance, with the troop ships and the merchantmen and the *Niobe* on guard. Länse and Margery were too busy, and too much caught into the whirl of things, to have time for regret. They went on board early, and by luncheon-time their guests had mostly assembled. Johnnie Dodd and Starling had come out to see them off, as well as Polly Harbord, and Beau Livingston looking as exquisitely cool as though dust and heat and the mental trouble in the air did not exist; and Joey Tullock from Simon's Town, who was ramping to take the *Skate* round to Durban, and the Drysdales, and Blanche Cunningham, more strikingly decorative than ever in the light of day, and bearing the Professor's good wishes, which were more welcome than his presence would have been; and Cissie Redmayne, who was attended by a Rondebosch man whom Wynberg only knew slightly, in place of her lawful husband, on duty

in Cape Town, — all the pleasant, careless people whom Madge had known well during the last few years, and who had been part and parcel of the ephemeral, shifting life which she was suddenly and strangely leaving. Their irresponsibility was hardly darkened even by the undeniable reality of pain and heroism and death and disaster, which the War had thrust amongst them ; only now and then the light chatter would diverge to some incident relating to a man at the front whom all had known, and who, it might be, was known to no one now save the Angel of Death, and then a shadow swept over the bright faces, as the wind swept the shadow of a cloud over the blue heights and depths of the mountains. The Croftons' party filled a table to themselves at lunch-time, and made merry, while the band played the National Anthem and Rule Britannia, and the champagne fizzed to the health of the troops, and the women's laughter belied the tears not far from their eyes.

"There is nothing so abominably merry as one of these leave-takings in Cape Town docks!" said Beau Livingston, when, after luncheon, he and Madge were leaning on the wooden rail of the promenade deck, watching the Kaffirs bringing in the last piles of luggage, and dusky salesmen trying to dispose of the skins and karooses which they spread on the stones of the quay to tempt passengers leaning over the boat's side. "I should like of course to cry bitterly — May I smoke? Thanks! it will sustain me — but out of feeling for you, I refrain."

"Cheer up! we may meet next in London. Starling told me you regretted my absence when she was Home, — I am treasuring that up for the future. Are you coming Home, Beau?"

"No, I think not. I shall wait and see it through. Besides, I am curious about the — er — distribution of prizes afterwards. I have great confidence in friend Rhodes."

"Supposing the prizes went to the Boers!"



"What a shocking idea! Kruger as head boy rather than Milner! Where is your loyalty?"

"Entirely with Sir Alfred — as every one's must be who has been here and witnessed what he has done. How quiet and dignified he has been through it all!"

"And yet," said Beau, taking the cigar daintily between two fingers of his right hand, and knocking the ash off with a third, "when you reach home you will probably find the Radical papers clamouring for his instant removal, and pointing out the things he has not done, and the things he has, which will be equal offences unto them! The Unionist Press may not follow suit; but it is more than probable that being 6,000 miles off, they will be more positive as to the right way of governing us than we presume to be ourselves. Don't get excited over it, pray!"

"I am not excited, — I don't know what you mean! But I should like to censure the whole Press, if it does n't back up Sir Alfred!"

"I thought as much. What a beautiful winter sunset! You will find none better in England."

"Beau, you are enigmatical, and I don't understand you. Mr. Johnnie, don't you agree with me that Sir Alfred is the man of the moment?"

"I wish he'd proclaim Martial Law down here!" said Johnnie Dodd, grimly. "Perhaps now Buller is out he will. Got a light, Livingston? My cigar's out."

As Beau supplied the match, Mrs. Drysdale took his place beside Madge for the moment. "We all want to talk to you," she said. "But Beau possesses a perfect genius for absorbing the object of interest in these cases. It is the careful way in which he has trained his own selfishness, I believe. Look at Cape Town, Madge! did you ever see it prettier?"

"Don't! I hate leaving the sunshine and the colour, and my own home. The garden is looking so lovely



just now, Clarice. I believe my heart will always be in Africa."

"It is a beautiful year. I have never seen the trees greener, or the vineyards more brilliantly fresh, or the plumbago bluer."

"We rode out nearly to Hout's Bay the other evening, —" Madge paused, and a curious look crossed her face. "I shall never forget it. The view was so intense and yet so soft, and the last sunbeams over the Nek were just kissing the top of the Devil's Peak. It all looked so pretty, — no, pretty is n't the word! That applies to English fields and hedgerows. It was so full of life and warmth. It was Africa!"

"Madge, how long do you feel you have lived since you came out here?"

"A lifetime. How I have altered, have n't I, and grown! I think I was in swaddling bands that day you found me, crying over Anthony's crossness, and the bad cooking, and the ugly furniture!"

"It was soon remedied, as I told you it would be. But the change does not lie in the greater power to reconstruct and manage things as you wish, does it? though that is something too. You *have* altered, — are you sorry?"

"I think not." Her eyes strayed away among the crowd on the wharf, — the Kaffirs, the loafers, the Officers of the boat superintending the arrival of the Mails. "I have been married, you see, — and I have Lanse!"

"Ah! I told you, you would find that men were not all brutes and fools. Have you proved it?"

"Yes, I think I have."

"Then the experience was worth while," said Mrs. Drysdale, in a rather strange fashion. "And the coming to Africa, and the lifetime crammed into the three years, and the mixing with men and women under different conditions, is all part of the learning how to live. But

I trembled for you once, Madge. It is sink or swim here !”

“ Perhaps it is both, — sink first, find the use of your hands and feet, and swim afterwards. Men learn it Up Country. We women seem to learn it in the stress and strain of new conditions of social life. And yet — the pain, Clarice ! How one pays for all knowledge in this world ! One learns real life by means of tears.”

“ I say, Madge,” said Blanche’s voice behind them. “ Have you heard that Ladysmith is cut off ?”

“ I supposed it would be,” said Margery, turning round. “ I heard from Miles Mowbray yesterday.”

“ They are pigging it dreadfully,” said Blanche. “ Forrester wrote to me, not long ago. He said they loathed the place. It’s more lively now though, I suppose !”

“ They will learn to be thankful for small mercies before they have done !” said Mrs. Drysdale. “ How’s the Professor, Mrs. Cunningham ?”

“ Liverish,” said Blanche, briefly. “ I advised him not to come to-day, under the circumstances. He sent you his love, Madge.”

“ That I’m sure he did n’t, Blanche ! Anthony never did such a thing in his life. I daresay he was polite enough to hope that I should n’t be seasick, and to cheerfully prognosticate that I should !”

Blanche smiled sleepily. “ You ought to have a good time anyhow,” she said. “ I like the men on this boat. I hope we shall be coming Home in the Spring, Madge. I don’t see why we should n’t.”

“ If any one could make Anthony unearth himself and come Home, I daresay you could. It was more than I ever accomplished, anyway. But I hope you will come, Blanche. Tell Anthony I’ll look him out a Flat near the British Museum.”

“ I say, you girls,” broke in Johnnie Dodd, — he had a genial way of grouping all womankind known to him under this head, — “ Beau tells me tea is going in

the Saloon. If you want any, you 'll have to look it up. The Mails always precede 'Any more for the shore.' "

"Very well, you come too," Clarice said airily, tucking her hand into his arm. "Are you coming, Madge? I dare n't leave Mr. Johnnie about, or he will be getting himself lost in the Captain's cabin, and have to make the voyage as a stowaway."

"One minute—" said Madge, hurriedly. "Is n't that an early edition? There 's a boy there with papers. Do get me one, Beau?"

Livingston raised his hand to the boy, and made a motion to a steward. In the pause that followed, Madge felt Mrs. Drysdale and Blanche move into the deck-house with Johnnie Dodd. They were still talking, and the chatter of the groups all round her, the passengers joining the boat and their friends seeing them off and giving last messages, still continued. But neither she or Beau said a word. She was even thinking, as the steward returned and put the thin flimsy sheet into her hands, that when communication was re-opened Jack Vibart would write to her again, and that she dreaded receiving his letters. He had written once since he left, a gay confident letter that troubled her, and he had said that he should write again soon. That he had not done so was due, no doubt, to his responsible position and the many duties it entailed on him. She wished that she had not taken his ring; that also had been simple impulse like all the rest of it. She had packed the little brown poetry book in her cabin trunk, with some idea of throwing it overboard and getting rid of it at last in that way. The ring was at that moment in her pocket. She had slipped it in there before starting, having forgotten to lock it up, as he had advised, in the hurry of packing and departure. Why had she ever taken it! How foolish it was, — it would mislead him, and make him think. . . . she must write from England and explain that she meant nothing now; she would re-



peat what she had said at Camp at the Tennis Tournament, only more gently. It was so unnecessary to inflict pain when there was so much one could not help in the world. She need not be rough. Perhaps she need not write at all, if he did not. . . .

She had turned the sheet to look for the long delayed list of casualties. It was headed with his name.

Beaumont Livingston, holding the paper with her, read over her shoulder: "Killed — Colonel John Mortimer Vibart. The Duke's. Sec. Lieu. Miles Mowbray." Then followed a list of wounded, George Tennyson and Scott Murray being amongst the names. "Poor Jack!" was all he said.

Margery took her hand slowly from the paper. Her eyes, still idly straying amongst the crowd on the quay, saw only the spectre of her fear during the bush fire, and again yesterday morning in the Hospital. Jack was dead! — poor, gay, handsome Jack, as innocent of morals as he was of physical fear! "A splendid soldier!" as Mowbray had said. The tribute from his junior Officer, killed in the same skirmish, rose to her mind. Even Miles Mowbray's death hardly affected her at the moment in the same way. She was sorry — so sorry that she felt she could have cried for him. But not for Jack, because it was so impossible. "Jack is dead. Jack is dead," she repeated to herself stupidly. "I knew this might happen any moment. And I can't believe it now." This man who had been her lover — in the shock of his death the truth stood bare, stripped of decency or prevarication, — whom she had felt in some sort she looked down upon for being so utterly human, so material — had suddenly passed above her into the majesty and elusiveness of death. Jack was dead. How could blame or tenderness touch him now? New resolves on her part affected him no longer. He was dead — she need not trouble herself.

She had forgotten Livingston entirely. Quietly, almost



mechanically, she slipped her hand into her pocket, and took out the heavy seal ring which even to handle had made her shrink an hour ago, it was so reminiscent of him and memories happier forgotten. She held it in her hand for a moment, looking at it curiously; then she dropped it over the boat's side, into the sullen dark water of the docks. In the bustle and confusion of the moment nobody saw her but the man at her side, and he was watching. Her face, perhaps, told him many things of which she was unconscious; the blue eyes fixed on her read through the veil of silence as undeniably as the Röntgen rays do through flesh, until he saw the skeleton beneath. He took the cigar from his lips again, and knocked the ash off thoughtfully against the wooden rail of the boat.

Margery turned from him as though she did not know he was there, and made an uncertain step towards the deckhouse.

"— and so my friend *shot* the tiger in the jungle!" said Beaumont Livingston to himself.

"Any more for the shore!"

Mr. Johnnie and his two companions reappeared breathlessly, and the next two minutes were a confusion of handshaking and farewell good wishes.

"Take the paper—there is bad news in it," Madge said, thrusting it into Mrs. Drysdale's hand. "I do not want it left. Good-bye, Clarice!"

They kissed each other. . . . As the gangplank was drawn up, a long cheer broke from the crowd on the quay, and as Margery lent on the rail she saw her friends standing there together in the sunshine, Beau Livingston's upright grey-clad figure, and beautiful mocking face, as he waved his hat, Clarice looking up at the boat, Blanche with the light on her red hair, Starling, Johnnie Dodd; . . . then she knew that Lanse had come and was leaning beside her, and the boat was moving slowly, slowly out of the docks. "Have you heard the news, Madge?"

he said. "Yes, I know," she answered. "I am awfully sorry. Poor fellows!" he added . . . farther, — farther yet — the great boat swinging round, and the sun going down. Some one spoke to Lanse, and he moved away, but the comfort of his presence remained with her. . . . A space of blue sea between shore and ship, the passengers leaving the promenade deck, and going below, as if it were all over. . . . Margery leaned on the rail and watched the sunset, and the line of the retreating shore. Cape Town was still sharply visible in the warm dying light, a city of big buildings, of strength and beauty and life, with the velvet mountain standing sentinel behind it. . . . One of the Officers of the boat hovered near her, wishing to speak and begin an acquaintance to be worked up on the voyage. She turned and smiled, with the assured position of a pretty woman. As he began to talk to her, she contrasted herself curiously with the shy girl who had come out three years before. She had been more eager for pleasure and distraction then, but she had not found it so ready to her hand as now. She had developed. She knew her own worth, and was sure of herself.

"Look your last at Cape Town, Mrs. Crofton!" said the Officer, suddenly.

The sun was going; as she turned and looked he touched the mountains. The ship held steadily on her outward way, the purple and sunset water widening between her and the shore. Overhead was an empty blue sky with one star — the evening star — hanging in the void. The light went lower, the Earth turned by just so much of a hair's-breadth as dropped the land out of sight of the ship, and Africa and the sun went down behind the round horizon together.









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